

LECTIO DIVINA AS A CATALYST FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH:
A CASE STUDY AMONG MATURE BELIEVERS

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BY
KATHERINE MILLS JOHNSON

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To Dick,

my beloved husband, encourager, friend, and editor par-excellence

They asked each other, "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*"

—Luke 24:32

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
Chapter	
1. THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING.....	1
2. THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	28
3. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	68
4. PROCEDURES AND RESEARCH DESIGN.....	127
5. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS	142
Appendix	
A. INVITATION LETTER.....	189
B. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT	190
C. INSTRUCTIONS AND INTRODUCTION (PROTESTANT)	192
D. INSTRUCTIONS AND INTRODUCTION (CATHOLIC)	195
E. PRAYER GUIDE.....	199
F. PRE-PROJECT SURVEY (PROTESTANT).....	222
G. PRE-PROJECT SURVEY (CATHOLIC).....	224
H. SAMPLE WEEKLY RESPONSE SHEET.....	226
I. POST-PROJECT SURVEY.....	227
J. PREQ6 RESPONSES.....	229
K. POSTQ1 RESPONSES	231
L. POSTQ4 RESPONSES	233

M. POSTQ5 RESPONSES	237
N. POSTQ7 RESPONSES	241
O. WEEKLY RESPONSE SHEETS—COMMENTS	243
P. WEEKLY RESPONSE SHEETS—DIFFICULTIES	257
BIBLIOGRAPHY	259
VITA	263

FIGURES

3:1 Different Authors' Views of Lectio Divina	120
4:1 Demographic Data.....	131
4:2 Age Ranges	132
4:3 Number of Years as a Christian	132
5:1 Satisfaction with Spiritual Life	169
5:2 Major Reasons for Spiritual Growth	171

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ABSTRACT

The recent rise in interest in spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines seems to indicate that there is a growing awareness of the need to attend to the spiritual lives of Christians especially those who have been believers for some time. Studies show that many believers consider themselves to be stalled in their spiritual growth and they often view prayer as a duty rather than a delight. The purpose of this thesis-project is to explore the question of whether or not prayer that is based in an intimate relationship with God, using Scripture as its foundation, can make a significant impact on the spiritual growth of Christians. To this end, thirty-eight individuals participated in a six-week study using *lectio divina* in their personal prayer time. Of these, 95 percent reported some degree of spiritual growth. The conclusion of this project is that *lectio divina* appears to have catalyzed growth in four areas: listening to God; deepening personal relationship with God; using Scripture as a basis for prayer; and being more disciplined in prayer.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

—Psalm 27:4

Introduction

Throughout three decades of Christian ministry and missionary service I have observed that many believers reach a point in their Christian life that is marked by a sense of dissatisfaction with their own lack of spiritual growth. They have studied the Bible and engaged in various church discipleship programs but no longer feel that they are growing in a significant way. Specifically, their prayer life is either non-existent or is not producing fruit. In many cases people either see prayer as a duty or as a means of obtaining what they want from God. They may also see themselves as having plateaued in their spiritual lives and have no idea how to move on toward spiritual maturity. In spite of this perceived lack of growth, there is an underlying desire among most believers to deepen their relationship with God by being transformed by the Word of God and by having communion with God in prayer.

Additionally, over the course of thirty years of teaching inductive Bible study and writing and leading Bible studies for various church and para-church groups, I have sensed a waning enthusiasm for this kind of study. And personally, the hours spent doing exegetical study that I used to find satisfying are no longer as fulfilling. About ten years ago, during a lengthy period of spiritual dryness, I spent some time reading various classic authors including Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross along with more recent

authors such as Basil Pennington, Thelma Hall, Thomas Green, Michael Casey and Thomas Dubay. I began to be drawn toward *lectio divina* and started to practice this kind of prayer. I found that my relationship with God was transformed and my enthusiasm for prayer renewed. At the same time I was involved in discipleship and training of people involved in several local prayer ministries. As we implemented prayer times that were based on a modified form of *lectio divina*, we began to see great progress in their spiritual growth, a renewed passion for prayer and significant personal transformation. It became clear that there was a need for and a receptiveness toward this kind of Scripture-based reflective prayer.

This need has led to my study of the theology, history and development of the practice of *lectio divina* and its resurgence in recent years. *Lectio divina*, a practice that has been used since ancient times, is a way to use Scripture reading as a launching point for prayer and communion with God. There is a great opportunity open for the church today to address Christians' desire to go deeper with God. The answer may not be another discipleship or Bible study program, but rather a return to the simple discipline of Scripture-based prayer and reflection—*lectio divina*—that positions the heart of the believer for the transforming work of God in their life.

Recent studies conducted by the Willow Creek Association support both the need for growth and the potential for the great impact of *lectio divina* as a catalyst for that growth. The studies, entitled *Reveal* and more recently, *Follow Me*, surveyed 80,000 people from 200 churches in order to determine how people perceive their own spiritual state and how to help people move into a more intimate and committed relationship with Christ. The data showed that 22 percent of those surveyed considered themselves stalled

in their spiritual growth.¹ Similar results were uncovered by research done by George Barna as quoted by Dave Brown: “Few believers said that their church lacked programs, but most Christians complained that little is done to effectively motivate and facilitate their development as genuine, fervent followers of Christ....most Christians are simply not making progress in their personal spiritual development.”²

The research from the *Reveal* study further showed that the best way to get people back on track from being stalled was by reengaging in personal spiritual practices. The study looked at many different spiritual practices and factors that influence spiritual growth and concluded that “reflection on Scripture is more influential than any other personal spiritual practice.”³ This was true across the whole range of spiritual maturity—from new Christians to those who considered Christ to be the most important relationship in their lives. But for the more advanced believer, reflection on Scripture was “twice as catalytic as any other factor.”⁴

Another aspect of this situation involves a seeming discrepancy between what people believe and what they actually practice. Many who are dissatisfied with their prayer lives also believe that reflection on Scripture and listening to God are important but they do not actually practice them. I surveyed a group of forty-three evangelical

¹ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Follow Me: What's Next for You?* (Barrington, IL: The Willow Creek Association, 2008), 85.

² Dave Brown, “Calling All Christian Men,” *New Man Magazine* 17, no. 28 (August 2010), www.wacmm.org/New-Man-Mag-Aug-2010.html. (accessed December 23, 2010).

³ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Follow Me*, 41.

⁴ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Follow Me*, 41.

Protestants who said that they had been Christians for more than twenty years.⁵ Of those surveyed, 63 percent indicated that they were not satisfied with their prayer lives. Reflection on Scripture was an important aspect of prayer for 91 percent but only 45 percent actually used their Bibles to help them pray. Results concerning the listening aspect of prayer were also revealing. Listening to God in prayer was important to 97 percent of the group surveyed them but on average they only spent 30 percent of their prayer time listening versus 70 percent talking. This seems to indicate that a desire to reflect on Scripture and to listen to God in prayer may already exist among many Christians, but for some reason they are not doing it on a regular basis or do not know how to do it at all.

Phillip Yancey reports similar results from interviewing people about prayer:

Typically the results went like this: Is prayer important to you? *Oh, yes.* How often do you pray? *Every day.* Approximately how long? *Five minutes – well, maybe seven.* Do you find prayer satisfying? *Not really.* Do you sense the presence of God when you pray? *Occasionally, not often.* Many of those I talked to experienced prayer more as a burden than as a pleasure. They regarded it as important, even paramount, and felt guilty about their failure, blaming themselves.⁶

Most people with whom Yancey came in contact were frustrated, confused and dissatisfied with their prayer life. Yancey proposes that some of the major contributing factors to this problem are advances in science and technology, modern skepticism, prosperity, time pressures, professional therapists, etc.⁷ I think each of these has some validity but none of them get at the root of what I believe to be the primary cause for the

⁵ These pre- and post-project surveys were conducted by the author on June 19 and August 21, 2010 in a local church in Arlington, Texas among participants in a multi-week School of Prayer.

⁶ Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2006), 15.

⁷ Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* 14.

prayerlessness of our time: an inadequate view and practice of prayer along with a lack of growth in relational intimacy with God. If prayer is primarily understood in terms of relationship, then people are able to enter into a satisfying encounter with the living God out of which flows prayer-as-encounter rather than prayer-as-a-cosmic-shopping-list.

In this thesis-project I will examine the question: Can significant spiritual growth result from the use of *lectio divina* by Christians who have a desire to grow and to deepen their prayer lives? My intent is to determine if a form of *lectio divina* can be used as an effective catalyst for spiritual growth (both to change people's perception of prayer and to increase their desire for a growing relationship with the Lord) in a church or ministry that is attempting to establish or strengthen prayer in their members. This thesis-project will also help determine if the practice of *lectio divina* can help people actually adopt the practices that they already believe are important.

A Modern Problem

Many factors contribute to the problem of stalled spiritual growth in the Church today. Some are cultural in nature while others are unique to the Church in general. At their core, however, many of them have in common a lack of understanding of what prayer can be and a lack of experience in life-transforming encounter with God in prayer. There is a great need for the prayers of Christians today to be informed by Scripture, to be a means of listening to God and to lead to life transformation.

One very significant problem arising out of today's "program-based" churches is the growing assumption that activity equals spiritual growth. This is not always the case. The authors of the *Reveal* study wrote, "we wanted to find evidence of spiritual growth in our people, and then figure out *what types of activities or circumstances triggered that*

spiritual growth” [emphasis added].⁸ Research was done among 14,000 current attendees of Willow Creek Community Church and 500 former members. Results revealed that there is no correlation between increased activity and spiritual maturity. Even so, outward activity that is visible tends to take priority over inward spiritual growth which seems invisible. This emphasis on activity is a reflection of our western culture that measures a person’s worth by what they do and how much they produce. It is easy for this value to be carried over into the Church and for members to equate involvement and activity with spiritual growth and maturity. Even the fact that the Willow Creek research was looking for the “activity” that triggered spiritual growth is evidence of how this cultural value has been absorbed by the Church. A result of this emphasis on involvement is churches that are full of people outwardly participating in various programs but inwardly feeling a lack of personal spiritual growth.

Because of this emphasis, leaders have inadvertently conveyed to their members a misunderstanding of God’s primary goal for the life of a Christian. As R. Thomas Ashbrook points out, goals such as holiness, usefulness, wholeness and enlightened understanding are worthy and desirable but focus on the self, while the real goal of our Christian life is a love relationship with God. He states, “A restored relationship of love with God through Jesus Christ is more than a means to another end; *it is the primary and foundational goal* [emphasis added] of spiritual growth.”⁹ This goal is focused on God himself and what he is doing, not on what a person is accomplishing himself. The goal

⁸ Greg L. Hawkins, Cally Parkinson, and Eric Arnson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: The Willow Creek Association, 2007), 29.

⁹ R. Thomas Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 26.

must not be activity and the goal cannot be accomplished in one's own strength.

Relationship is the goal. It is in this relationship of loving intimacy that Christians experience the transformation so longed for in the rest of their lives. The role of the believer is to position their heart for God's transforming work. Many believers have the misconception that spiritual growth and maturity can be measured in terms of activity or ministry effectiveness. Good works, fruit of the Spirit, and love of neighbor will always flow out of an authentic loving relationship with God. As a person grows closer to Jesus, he or she will become more like him as they cooperate with his work in them.

Ashbrook's definition of spiritual formation is helpful at this point because it connects the goal of the Christian life with the process and sets the stage for the suggestion that *lectio divina* can be a catalyst for spiritual growth. He says that spiritual formation is "The process that takes place in us as the life of the Spirit of God transforms our life through deepening love and intimacy with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remaking us in the likeness of Jesus Christ, in His love for the Father and the world."¹⁰

Therefore, a growing love relationship with God has to be the essential characteristic and primary end of any personal spiritual practices that are employed. If the goal of spiritual practices is not growing in that love relationship, then a Christian's best efforts to grow spiritually will result in disappointment instead of spiritual growth. Similarly, in order for *lectio divina* to work, all four typical stages must point to the goal of growing more and more into a loving relationship with God.¹¹ Like any other spiritual discipline undertaken with the wrong goal in mind, *lectio divina* can degenerate into self-

¹⁰ Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart*, 32.

¹¹ The four typical stages of *lectio divina* are *lectio* (reading), *meditation* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation).

effort that leads nowhere. The beauty of using *lectio divina* as a catalyst for spiritual growth is that, with the proper goal in mind, it will not leave people plateaued after a year or two. This is because, unlike some modern fads, it is based on plumbing the endless riches of God's Word that will never run dry.

Part of the lack of spiritual growth in prayer among Christians can be attributed to the "prayer-ministries" model used by many churches. In this model, prayer is defined solely in terms of intercession, and involvement in prayer ministries primarily means being on a prayer chain that receives a list of prayer requests from church members and prays for those requests. This model reinforces the notion that prayer is only something for a few people to do (usually women) and that its primary purpose is to get God to give pray-ers what they think they want or need, as if prayer is basically a cosmic shopping list. The importance of the intercessory aspect of prayer is not to be overlooked. However, when this is the only kind of prayer that happens in a church, then members are missing out on an important aspect of the Christian life and may develop a view of prayer that does not involve a transformational process toward Christlikeness and relational intimacy with God.

Prayer can also be used as a means of making a series of unbiblical pronouncements or proclamations designed to bring about change or circumstances that the one praying deems appropriate. The "health and wealth Gospel" is a primary example of this kind of misunderstanding. Scripture-based prayer such as *lectio divina* offers an effective solution to these problems because it helps make prayers biblical, and then it helps lead the person into an encounter with God where true change and growth takes place.

Several other contributing factors from American culture must also be taken into consideration when examining the problem of waning spiritual growth. One such cultural value is the demand for instant answers and immediate satisfaction. Prayer delivers neither. *Lectio divina* is a slowed-down, patient, quiet way of prayer, usually with no immediate visible effect. Waiting rather than demanding—listening rather than talking—are necessary for a transforming life of prayer. The outcome that is outwardly seen is not instantaneous and can only grow from what takes place inwardly and is unseen. It is clear that there are no easy answers or fixed sets of steps to take to overcome this current state in the church. On the contrary, the very concepts behind *lectio divina*, such as silence, rest, unhurried listening and receptivity seem to fly in the face of deeply ingrained cultural and social values and practices of our time. Such prayer, that may on the surface appear unproductive, is in reality a powerful way to counteract the cultural forces that militate against a deeper spiritual life.

One such cultural factor that must be taken into account in the analysis of the problem is the fact that modern lives are filled with constant distractions and an overabundance of information. Television, computers, the Internet and social networking present endless opportunities for mindless activity and impersonal interaction, both of which detract from the ability to quiet the mind and heart and to interact in a deep and personal way with God in prayer. Technology can numb minds and deaden hearts, making reflection, solitude and silence seem like strangers to be avoided. In order for *lectio divina* to become a welcome companion in Christians' lives, they must be motivated to lay aside enticing distractions.

Church leaders themselves can contribute to the problem of prayerlessness and lack of growth. The example they set is crucial and indispensable. If a pastor or leader does not spend time in prayer, the people he or she leads will not place a high value on it. If a pastor is seen to be spending time with God and letting himself be transformed by the Word, if he values relationship with God above all else, then the people will have a reason to listen to him when he speaks of the importance of prayer. Of pastors, Eugene Peterson says, "The inner action of prayer takes precedence over the outer action of proclamation."¹² Pastors or leaders must not only set an example but they must also have personal experience and understanding of the different stages of spiritual growth and how to lead their people into them. One problem in many congregations that report a large number of their members to be stalled or dissatisfied with their spiritual growth is that the pastor is also stuck and has no idea how to move on.

A cultural analysis of the problem must also include a look at two extremes of a continuum that exist within the church today and how *lectio divina* is relevant to both. One extreme is represented by those Christians that are very familiar with the Bible but do not pray. They love the Word of God but are cautious about anything that could be labeled "mysticism." Their faith is intellectually based and their experience of God's presence is limited. The affective side of their relationship with God may even be avoided. The potential weakness of this group is that they are so busy knowing about God that they fail to have any kind of personal relationship with him. This dilemma can be heard in the words by David Benner, "For many years my knowing of God was primarily a matter of knowing *about* him. I began to feel dissatisfied with my limited direct

¹² Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 40.

experience of God's presence. I longed to know him personally and experientially, not just know about him."¹³ This group's strength is in their knowledge of the Word. The second extreme among Christians today is represented by people who have an interest in "spirituality" but not one that is informed by Scripture. They may be intrigued by the mystical aspects of religion but lack the biblical roots to discern true Christian spirituality. The potential weakness of this group is to become unbiblical or heterodox in their beliefs and practices. Their strength is in their emphasis on the heart and on experiential knowledge of God.

Interestingly, these two extremes can be seen as loosely representing the nature of Protestant and Catholic forms of spirituality respectively, although there may be groups that do not fit neatly into this categorization (e.g. Charismatic Protestants may tend to lean toward the second extreme).¹⁴ The beauty of *lectio divina* is that, when properly understood and used, it addresses the weaknesses of both extremes and gives voice to their strengths. Because it is biblically informed, *lectio divina* sets a solid foundation for prayer and contemplation because they emerge from reading and meditation on the Word. And, because the goal of *lectio divina* is relationship and communion with God, the affective nature of spirituality is also validated and encouraged to grow.

This study will focus on the use of *lectio divina* because it is Scripture-based and relationship-oriented. This kind of prayer has stood the test of time, and I believe that it has great potential to be an effective solution to the problem of believers being stalled in

¹³ David G Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002), 30.

¹⁴ It is impossible as well as undesirable to try to categorize all Christians into a neatly defined position. These two extremes are generalizations for the purpose of making the point that there is a tendency to lean in one direction or the other.

their growth. *Lectio divina* incorporates reflection on Scripture as suggested by the Willow Creek research and then goes even further to include prayer and contemplation. It is expected that this discipline will be even more effective than Scripture reflection alone.

An Ancient Solution

In this thesis-project, I am proposing an ancient solution to a modern problem. It turns out, however, that the problem is not unique to the modern world. While the monastic setting of the third and fourth centuries in which *lectio divina* arose, and the following centuries in which it became well established, appear to be much different than the context of the modern church, there are significant similarities. The first and most important unchanging factor is that modern believers still need to be transformed by the Word of God and have communion with God in prayer. The monastics' primary goal for spiritual growth was the same as the goal of Christians today: a relationship of love with God. They struggled, as many do now, with maintaining a prayerful way of life in the midst of activity, distraction and a secular culture. It was out of this struggle that the monastics developed a way of praying the Scripture, so as to be steeped in and transformed by it. Silence and solitude, necessary for *lectio divina*, were part of their rule of life as they set aside time apart from the busyness and struggles of everyday life. The early monastics did not have easy individual access to Scripture as people today do, but they still possessed the desire to read it and be transformed by it. They were not trying to escape the world, as some of the early desert fathers and mothers did, but they gave themselves to a rule of life (e.g. St. Benedict's Rule) in order to deliberately place their relationship with God at the center of their lives. In this way they are much the same as

Christians today: they desired to have their lives of service informed by the Word of God and for ministry to flow out of their relationship of love with God.

In the broad evangelical context, more encouragement has been given to Bible study than to Bible reflection and prayer. An emphasis on reading for information is common and reinforced by many Bible schools and seminaries. The evangelical church is producing leaders that believe they can handle the Word of God well but do not know how to lead their people into intimacy with God. Unless a deliberate effort is made, academic endeavor can take the place of prayer and true spiritual growth. Even the *Reveal* study's suggestion of reflective Bible reading does not go far enough because it can too easily remain an activity of the mind. It is vital that reading for encounter and transformation be brought to the fore in churches and Christian higher education. It must be recognized and given priority that people are transformed as they grow in intimacy with God, spending time with Him—especially in his Word, reflecting on who He is and who they are in him. Christians need an ongoing experiential encounter with the God who loves them. Deep reflection on the Scripture, not just reading or skimming through or even exegeting a text, can lead to a transforming personal encounter with Christ that catalyzes spiritual growth. It is this relationship of knowing God and being known by him that changes a person from the inside out. Benner describes it:

I meditate on his love, allowing my focus to be on him and his love for me, not me and my love for him. And slowly things begin to change. My heart slowly begins to warm and soften. I begin to experience new levels of love for God. And slowly, almost imperceptibly, I begin to see others through God's eyes of love. I begin to experience God's love for others.¹⁵

¹⁵ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 34.

Lectio divina is reading Scripture in a way that transforms believers, reading Scripture in a way that disposes them to deepen their relationship with God. *Lectio divina* naturally takes the reader from reading to reflection to responding and resting in the presence of God. It is actually a very simple way of praying. It is attractive because it is all about nourishing one's relationship with God and allowing him to take that person to a deeper place in that relationship. This kind of encounter with God is seen with David in the Psalms (Ps 27:4; 63:1-5; 84:10). Therefore, the most fruitful kind of prayer focuses on spending time meditating on and praying the Scriptures and letting God touch and transform one into his image. *Lectio divina* includes the component of encountering God; this is what can move people from feeling stagnant to growing spiritually. It has the potential of being a means to help answer the longing to know God personally and experientially. I expect, therefore, that *lectio divina* will act as a catalyst to help move people beyond their perceived state of spiritual stagnation into a direct experience of God's presence.

Further insight into catalyzing spiritual growth and moving beyond the stage of being "stalled" comes from an ancient source: St. Teresa of Avila's writings in *Interior Castle* and her explanation of the seven mansions in which a Christian lives and journeys during his life in Christ. Her description of the third mansion, in particular, helps to more fully understand the Willow Creek research on dissatisfied Christians who reach a certain point in their spiritual growth and seem to go no further. She describes a Christian in the third mansion as having committed their life to Christ, living out their beliefs and being involved in ministry. Thomas Ashbrook's interpretation of Theresa's third mansion is particularly helpful:

By the time we have come to “make our home” in the third mansion, we have developed a relatively balanced life of discipleship. Regular church attendance and ministry, consistent prayer, a concerted effort to live the Christian life, and a genuine desire to please and honor God are evidences of spiritual growth. Teresa says: “I have known some souls and even many—I believe I can say—who have reached this state and have lived many years in this upright and well-ordered way both in body and soul, insofar as can be known.” It is worth observing that the third of the seven mansions is about as far as most churches go in their teaching about the spiritual life. It’s an important phase of our growth, and many of us get stuck here. But we will see that there is more, much more.¹⁶

The key to the shift from third mansion experience to fourth mansion has to do with the focus of prayer. One becomes more interested in being with God than finding out about him. “The fourth mansion marks the wonderful beginning of ‘infused prayer,’ where God sets the agenda.”¹⁷ St. Teresa of Avila and Thomas Ashbrook help Christians understand this vital fourth mansion aspect of their prayer life. It is in this phase that contemplation becomes an important part of one’s prayer. The attention and focus is no longer on self but on God. This is when one learns about simply being still and quiet in his presence and taking delight in beholding him. At this stage, *lectio divina* can be a great help in growing in relational intimacy with God because it can help one move from meditation into contemplation, where we learn to wait on God and abide in him. This movement is marked by a focus on God alone. Ashbrook says:

Unfortunately, many of us who are hungry for God have never been taught about meditation and contemplation. To the contrary, many churches have given these concepts over to Eastern religions and New Age religions, and they urge prohibition of these ‘abiding’ forms of prayer. One of two things happens to us when we enter the fourth mansion but have no knowledge of abiding types of prayer. Either we naturally move into a more responsive and listening form of prayer (without knowing anything about contemplation or learning ways that

¹⁶ Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart*, 91-92.

¹⁷ Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart*, 115.

make it easier) or we get struck, longing for a deeper experience of God but not finding it.¹⁸

This is precisely what *lectio divina* can do: teach believers about the disciplines of silence, waiting and abiding. They are led into a place where God can infuse them with his love and transform their hearts in his presence as they become like the one upon whom they gaze (2 Cor 3:18).

Every believer is called into a dynamic transforming relationship with God. Prayer is central to spiritual growth because it is personal communication with God and a time when the individual opens themselves up to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this thesis-project is to present the ancient spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*, as a means of catalyzing spiritual growth. Christians of the modern generation can benefit greatly by recovering this art of sacred reading. When properly understood and integrated into one's spiritual life, *lectio divina* can be a means by which individuals experience tremendous personal growth and transformation. This project also will assist those who are seeking to lead others into a deeper relationship with God.

Setting and Terminology

My experience in ministry has been primarily with evangelical Protestants of many denominations and with charismatic non-denominational Protestants. Those from the first group have often had some biblical training and exposure to discipleship programs over the years. They may attend regular prayer meetings and be able to quote Scripture. When they are asked about their personal prayer life it tends to be more about duty than about relationship. Many of those from the latter group have little Biblical

¹⁸ Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart*, 121.

grounding in their faith. When they come together to pray it is not unusual for their prayers to evidence a lack of Scriptural truth or even to contradict Scripture. People in the group training programs I referenced earlier, both young and old, have benefitted greatly from being taught how to pray Biblically. My desire is to see them progress even further and gain a depth of spiritual maturity that is only possible through a sustained personal prayer life and encounter with God.

My ministry experience also has included involvement with Roman Catholics in various settings both in the Philippines and here in the United States. Currently I am serving in an advisory role with *Communities of Prayer*, a ministry that is promoting prayer and providing training for individuals and groups within the Catholic Church who desire to deepen their experience of prayer both individually and corporately. The challenge with introducing *lectio divina* to this group is that they tend to be very used to structured prayers and need encouragement and explanation in order to be able to move from memorized prayer or the pages of a prayer book into personal communication with God from the heart. This will be addressed in part by having participants journal their own prayers as part of their prayer time. Another challenge is the issue of Biblical literacy. *Lectio divina* for this group may need to have more biblical background introduced into the process so that participants are aware of the cultural and historical aspects of the Scripture they are reading.

The setting for this thesis-project, both Protestant and Catholic, must also take into consideration that the prevailing culture does not promote or help facilitate the silence and solitude necessary for developing a growing spiritual life. This thesis-project is an attempt to reveal the necessity and effectiveness of the discipline of *lectio divina*

while at the same time presenting it in a way that is simple enough to be done by anyone with a busy schedule.

Over the course of the last two years I have written and designed a series of prayer guides to encourage prayer that is centered on Scripture and listening to God. Because these guides were designed primarily for use in a group setting, they were not easily able to include the fourth stage of contemplation. In group *lectio*, it is only feasible to do the first three stages; contemplation is not as easily accessible because of the need for silence and solitude. Group *lectio divina* was very helpful for most participants but they needed a way to transfer all four stages into their personal prayer life. There was a great interest among people to experience contemplation but not much time available for training. This led to my desire to develop a simple prayer guide that could be used with minimal instruction during private devotional times. It was my hope and expectation that the practice of individual *lectio divina* would result in significant spiritual growth and increased interest in prayer.

During the early development of the *lectio* guide, I found that some of the core vocabulary typically used to explain *lectio divina* seemed to be more Catholic than Protestant. For Protestants there was a need to translate the language and ideas into acceptable terminology for use in their Protestant context. There was also a need to teach enough theological and scriptural background to assure the participants that they were not being asked to engage in any kind of eastern or New Age mysticism. As long as a clear Biblical theology of prayer was identified and explained, people from a Protestant background were comfortable learning about meditation and contemplation. (Concerns

expressed by some evangelical Protestants regarding *lectio divina* and spiritual disciplines are addressed throughout Chapters Two and Three.)

On the other hand, the Catholic test group needed no convincing of the value of meditation and contemplation. They were familiar, or at least comfortable, with the vocabulary used by most writers. There has been a recent emphasis on the Bible and on encouraging the use of *lectio divina*. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI said,

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of “*lectio divina*”: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (*Dei Verbum*, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual spring-time.¹⁹

In this thesis-project *lectio divina* will be tested as a tool for catalyzing spiritual growth among both Protestants and Catholics. Some adjustments will be made for vocabulary but overall, the tool remains the same.

Assumptions and Limitations

For the purposes of this thesis-project, it is assumed (for reasons developed in Chapter Two) that spiritual formation and growth are to be valued above church programs and activity. It is also taken as a given that substantial attention should be paid to addressing the need for and facilitating the growth of Christians who have already reached a certain stage of maturity. New believers will also benefit, but the use of *lectio divina* as proposed here is geared for believers who have been on the path of discipleship

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, “Address to the International Congress On Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church” (lecture, Castel Gandolfo, Lazio, Italy, September 16, 2005), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050916_40-dei-verbum_en.html (accessed June 2, 2011).

for a significant period of time and who for the most part are living out their Christian beliefs.

All spiritual disciplines are valuable for growing in spiritual maturity. Calhoun says:

Spiritual transformation comes from partnering with the Trinity for change. We bring our ache for change, our longing...our desperation.... Then we keep company with Jesus by making space for him through a spiritual discipline. Our part is to offer ourselves lovingly and obediently to God. God then works within us doing what he alone can do.²⁰

While there are other spiritual disciplines that can lead to spiritual growth and transformation (Calhoun lists a total of sixty-two²¹), I chose *lectio divina* because I believe that it combines the best elements of many of the disciplines. Moreover, it is especially attractive because it is based on Scripture and is thus less prone to excess or error. *Lectio divina* has also stood the test of time and has been practiced by Christians since the third century. Because of the long-lived success of *lectio divina* through the centuries and its basis in Scripture, I believe that it will sustain growth over the long haul. Despite its recent increasing popularity in the evangelical world, it is much more than a passing fad.

Many of the disciplines from Calhoun's list come into play at one time or another in *lectio divina*. For example, the four stages (reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation) can incorporate solitude, silence, detachment, confession, self-examination, discernment, humility, journaling, practicing the presence, praying

²⁰ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 19.

²¹ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 11-13.

scripture, slowing, rest, secrecy, submission and teachability. This thesis-project assumes that all the disciplines incorporated into the practice of *lectio divina* are vitally important to ongoing spiritual growth and transformation. There is enough flexibility within the practice that one can choose to concentrate on those which work best for them. *Lectio divina* should be adapted to the particular needs of individuals who can be served by it.²²

The prayer guides for this thesis-project were developed under the assumption that *lectio divina* would help lead people into an encounter with God in prayer and, further, that this encounter with God would result in discernable spiritual growth. Therefore the expected outcome was that, once *lectio divina* became an established pattern for prayer, it would act as a catalyst for spiritual growth. It must be noted, however, that transformation is not something that one can control or force. What can be controlled is using the discipline to position the heart in a place where God is given space and time to speak and do his transforming work. "Our desires [for change] don't obligate the holy One. God is free to come to us in spiritual disciplines as he wills, not as we demand. But unless we open ourselves to him through spiritual practices, we will miss his coming altogether."²³ This thesis-project, conducted over a six to eight week time frame, was long enough to establish a habit of using *lectio divina* regularly and to give the participants time to decide if they perceived growth in personal prayer.

This thesis-project also assumes that each of the four stages of *lectio divina* is integral to the process of transformation and growth. *Reading Scripture* is first and

²² It is significant that, in his address on Sept 16, 2005 (see footnote 19, Ch. 1), Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes the need for this kind of flexibility, "As a strong point of biblical ministry, '*lectio divina*' should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times."

²³ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 19.

provides the solid framework for the three next stages: *Meditation* allows the Holy Spirit to inform the mind and will with the truth of Scripture; *Prayer* is both listening and responding to God; *Contemplation* is being with God and letting him have his way in one's life. A basic understanding of all four stages is necessary for the effectiveness of *lectio divina* as a catalyst for spiritual growth. This will be more fully discussed in Chapter Two.

There are many barriers to change and growth, too numerous to mention, that are either of one's own doing or due to external circumstances. There are also many limitations, both personal and cultural, that conspire to hinder the work of God in the human heart. This thesis-project assumes that growth can take place in anyone who so desires and seeks it. "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"²⁴ (Phil 1:6). "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10).

There are two key dispositions of the heart that need to be present in some degree in order for genuine growth to take place. The first is humility. Humility is essential in overcoming barriers or limitations of any kind. It is assumed that humility is a key to transformation and that in order for *lectio divina* to be an effective tool for God to use, one must come with humility of heart and openness to change. This humility includes a biblical understanding of who God is and who believers are in him. The beauty of *lectio divina* is that even when people come to God with misconceptions about him and

²⁴ All Scripture references in this project are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

themselves, meditation on Scripture will tend to sort these out and result in ongoing growth and orthodox understanding of God and his ways. The Scripture-based nature of *lectio divina* makes it a wonderful tool for God to use in speaking truth to a believer's heart.

The second attitude of heart necessary for growth is hunger for God (see Ps 63:1-5). Believers grow in depth of spirituality in direct proportion to their humility of heart and hunger for God. While they cannot expect growth to take place by their efforts alone, they also cannot expect growth if they do not place themselves in a position where God has permission to come in and do his work. "The simple truth is that *wanting* to keep company with Jesus has a staying power that 'shoulds' and 'oughts' seldom have. Jesus wants us to recognize that hidden in our desperations and desires is an appetite for the Lord and Giver of life."²⁵ God responds to humility and hunger (Matt 5:6; Jas 4:6; Ps 107:9).

Methodology and Parameters of the Project

An initial survey was taken of study participants to assess their perception of their own spirituality and their satisfaction with the current state of their spiritual life. The primary research question being considered is, "Can *lectio divina* be an effective catalyst for spiritual growth?" To be able to answer this question, the following factors were assessed:

- How does each participant currently perceive their own spirituality?
- Do they believe that they have grown significantly in the last 3 years?

²⁵ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 16.

- Do they have a desire to grow right now?
- Do the participants believe that Scripture reflection is important?
- Do they regularly use Scripture to inform their prayer life? How?
- How do they view prayer?
- What is their actual experience of prayer?

This thesis-project made use of a Christ-centered, Scripture-based prayer guide created by the author to be used over the course of six weeks. The prayer guide introduced the participants to *lectio divina* for the purpose of determining if this kind of prayer leads to discernable spiritual growth. The guide was developed and modified over the course of four years for use by individuals and groups. It was specifically designed to introduce and practice the four stages of *lectio divina*: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation.

The individuals that tested the effectiveness of the guide were Protestant missionaries, other mature believers, and a group of Catholic laypersons. The prayer guide was designed to inspire and motivate people to spend time in prayer as well as to be a catalyst for spiritual growth—specifically using the Scriptures, listening to God, responding to him and being transformed in his presence. I expected to see that by the end of a six week period, participants would perceive a positive change in their relationship with God, a renewed enthusiasm for the Word and that they would move forward in spiritual growth. I also expected that their attitude toward and understanding of prayer would change and that they would desire to establish habits of the spiritual disciplines of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation on a regular basis in their lives. The accompanying changes might also include an increase in their desire to read

the Scriptures, more satisfaction with their prayer life, growing hunger for God and increased perception of intimacy with God.

Each participant used the prayer guide three times per week for six weeks. The objective in using the prayer guide was for the participants to pray using the four stages of *lectio divina* in order to experience growth. In brief, each of these four stages provides an excellent setting for potential and meaningful spiritual growth as follows:

1. *Scripture Reading* – sets the context for prayer in the truth of Scripture; teaches concentration and focus; keeps prayers orthodox.
2. *Meditation* – reflection allows God to enlighten the mind.
3. *Prayer* – is a conversation with God and comes as a heart-response to the truths reflected upon in meditation. It involves asking questions and listening for a response from God.
4. *Contemplation* – is beyond words and involves silence, encounter and being with God. It is a place of life transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The prayer guide encouraged journaling for the sake of recording what the person experienced in prayer and to aid in evaluation of the guide's effectiveness. Informed consent was obtained in order for the journals from the prayer guides to be returned at the end of the six-week period. All participation was on a voluntary basis. A six week period of practicing *lectio divina* provided an opportunity to observe the results of an extended, purposeful time in prayer and to see if it served as an effective catalyst for growth.

After using the prayer guide for six weeks, a follow-up survey was taken to measure the impact of this spiritual discipline on the participants' relationship with God and to determine if they perceived that any growth had taken place. Questions were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the prayer guides and to see if any changes needed to be made. One way to measure individual spiritual growth resulting from the use of *lectio*

divina would be to see an increase in some or all of the following: time spent in prayer, enjoyment of prayer, comfortableness with silence, time spent listening to God, longing for God, anticipation of prayer time, perceived closeness to God, and intent to pursue prayer.

A Preview of the Remaining Chapters

The chapters of this thesis-project are outlined as follows: Chapter Two will explore the spiritual theology of *lectio divina*. It will establish the biblical and theological basis for prayer using the four stages of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. Chapter Three will examine the wide body of literature that deals with *lectio divina*. Catholic writers on this topic are numerous but there is a recent development of increasing interest in this topic among Protestants. Material that documents the relationship between *lectio divina* and individual spiritual growth is scarce, therefore I will be drawing conclusions from related topics and surveys. Insights from various authors from a wide range of perspectives will be presented. Key insights from Catholic and Protestant authors will be the focus of the first part of this chapter. The second half of the chapter will look at what the different authors have to say about practicing the four stages of *lectio divina*. Chapter Four will outline the project using a six-week long prayer guide that has been developed to introduce participants to *lectio divina* and guide them through the four stages and provide directions for reading, prayer and journaling. A pre- and post-study survey will measure the perceived impact of *lectio divina* on each individual's spiritual growth. Chapter Five will provide an analysis of the lessons learned. It will discuss how the research was done and what information was gleaned from the

research. An evaluation and critique of the research process, as well as the value of the research and need for future study, will be outlined.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

—Revelation 3:20

Introduction

At the core of all Christian spirituality is a personal relationship with the living God. Therefore, growing and nurturing that relationship is the primary concern and occupation of all Christians. Jesus called this the “one thing needed” when he affirmed Mary of Bethany for taking the time to sit at his feet and listen to him (Luke 10:42). This chapter will demonstrate how one’s relationship with God is the foundation and motivation for all Christian spiritual formation. It will also show that this relationship can be developed and nurtured through *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina*, described more fully later, is the ancient practice of reading, pondering, praying, listening and ultimately encountering the living Word of God in order to grow in an intimate relationship with him. This practice began in the early years of the Church, has developed through the centuries and is seeing a resurgence of popularity in the present day.

Through this spiritual discipline, believers can come to know God more fully, know who they are in him, and be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the people he desires them to be. *Lectio divina* can be used by God to teach people about himself, speak to them through his Word and transform their hearts and lives. Carol Lankford explains how *lectio divina* is really a relationship-oriented way of praying:

One of the most reliable and privileged meeting places for this very real, speaking-listening relationship to take place, is in the prayerful pondering of

Scripture. ...This prayerful progression using Scripture is the timeless *Lectio Divina*, and it is not a technique, but rather a way that incorporates the natural development of relationship—prayer is relationship—as we pray with the Scripture. It is not a method of human invention, but derives from the way God has touched and drawn human hearts down through the ages. It happens automatically, really, as we sincerely spend time with the Word of God and seek to practice its direction.¹

The Language of Relationship

Scripture demonstrates throughout that God desires relationship with his people. From Genesis to Revelation, through the entire redemptive history of his people, God uses the language of relationship to show, in words that they can understand, how he desires to relate to them. The language he uses is that of the living God who created a people for himself and made possible a way for them to come into relationship with him. Even in their failure to maintain that relationship, he made a way for them to be reconciled and return to the original purpose for which they were created. Several categories of descriptive language show how relationship with his people is paramount in the heart of God.

Family

The language of *family* is one way God demonstrates that he desires such a relationship. God himself says that his people will call him “Father” and in fact, longs for them to do so (Ps 89:26; Jer 3:19). He relates to them as a compassionate and loving Father (Ps 103:13; Pr 3:12). In times of distress and return from rebellion, God’s people remind him that he is their Father (Isa 63:16). Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to God as “our/your Father” and he instructs his disciples to call him Father

¹ Carol Lankford. “Intimacy with Jesus Through Scripture: Praying with Scripture,” January 2004. Marian Catechist Apostolate. http://www.mariancatechist.com/formation/spiritual_practices/meditation/intimacy_thru_scripture.html (accessed August 5, 2011).

(Matt 5-6). God's children have the privilege in prayer of calling him "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15-16).

Love

The language of *love* also gives insight into God's desire for relationship with his people. God will settle for nothing less than an exclusive relationship with them. In the midst of the Ten Commandments, he declares that he is a jealous God and will love those who love him alone (Exod 20:5-6). When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37). This all-of-life consuming love is to be the first priority of every believer. Love also describes who God is and how he feels about his people. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:8-10). God's love for his people is everlasting and draws them to respond (Jer 30:22). It is impossible to enter into a relationship with God without some understanding of his love and loving him in return.

Covenant

This desire for relationship with his people is also demonstrated in *covenant* language. This relationship was not to be one-way only, but a mutual, loving, exclusive arrangement. God said to his people, "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands...I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Lev 26:3, 11-12). He wanted a relationship of mutual belonging, where his presence marked his people and

their love was shown by loving obedience to him. Paul combines this covenant language with familial terms when he reminds the Corinthians of the unique, exclusive nature of their relationship with God:

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate...I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 6:16-18)

Intimacy

God reveals the priority he places on relationship with words like “with,” “walk,” “close,” and “in,” all of which indicate a nearness or intimacy that God desires to have with his people. This language of *closeness* or *intimacy* goes both ways: God wants to be near them and he wants them to desire nearness to him. Many of his promises include “I will be/I am with you” (Gen 26:24; Exod 33:14; Josh 1:5,9; Isa 41:10; Matt 28:20; John 14:3, 16). Jesus, in his high priestly prayer, voiced his longing to his Father for those who had been given to him to be with him (John 17:24). Enoch and Noah’s close relationship with God is described with the words, they “walked with God” (Gen 5:22; 6:9). God’s people are described as being “close to his heart” (Ps 148:14; Is 40:11). The desire of God’s heart is for the one who will “devote himself to be close to me” (Jer 30:21). As Christians, our relationship with Christ is described as being “in him” (Acts 17:28; Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:17). Jesus urges us to remain or abide “in him” (John 15:4-10). This very desire of Jesus can be seen by the use of the word “in” through this section of his upper room discourse:

My prayer is...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me.

I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them. (John 17: 20-23, 26)

A friend of mine once said that “with” and “by” are good but you can’t get any closer than “in.”² All of these words speak of being in and maintaining a close, intimate relationship with the living God.

Marriage

From the beginning of human history, God has desired a relationship with his people that is exclusive, intimate, holy and inviolable. The language of *marriage* is used throughout Scripture to refer to this kind of bond. In the Old Testament God refers to himself as “husband” and to his people as “bride.” (Isa 54:5; 62:5; Jer 2:1-2; 3:14). The people of God are betrothed to him. When Israel broke covenant with God, he considered it to be equivalent to adultery (Jer 3:6, 20). The book of Hosea elaborates on what God intended for his people using language that describes the intimacy of marriage. The Song of Songs traditionally has been interpreted as a description of God’s relationship to his people as a bridegroom to a bride. John the Baptist announces Jesus to be the Bridegroom (John 3:29). Jesus also refers to himself as the Bridegroom (Matt 9:15) and likens the Kingdom of God to a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (Matt 22:2-3). Paul uses the marriage bond to describe the mystery of the unity of Christ and his church (Eph 5:31). The destiny of God’s beloved people is a wedding. The church is the bride who is preparing herself for the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 21: 2-4; 9-10; 19:9).

² Darrell W. Johnson said this during his time as pastor of Union Church of Manila (1986-88).

Preparation for the Wedding

If this exclusive, intimate relationship with God is at the core of every Christian life, and the ultimate destiny of the bride of Christ—the Church—is the eternal continuation of this relationship, then we must examine how the bride can make herself ready. How is it that, when it comes time for Christ to take his bride to the place that he has prepared for her (John 14:2,3), she is a “bride beautifully prepared for her husband” (Rev 21:2)? Scripture points out two important ways that Christians become prepared. Both are possible only in the intimacy of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Both are also, ongoing, life-long occupations and the goal of every Christian.

Knowing God

First, knowing God is the ultimate way that the bride becomes prepared. Jesus equates knowing God with eternal life: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3-4). Knowing God is of primary importance to every Christian. It is the “one thing” that must be placed above all others. That is why David said, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (Ps 27:4). David knew that he would come to know God by spending time in his presence. Mary of Bethany also chose the “one thing” that was needed: to sit at Jesus’ feet (Luke 10:42). Taking the time to get to know him better took precedence over everything else going on at the time.

Knowing God is a two way relationship: “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. *But now that you know God—or rather are known by God* [emphasis added]—how is it that you are turning back to

those weak and miserable principles?” (Gal 4:8-9). Christians have a relationship with God of mutual “knowing” that needs to be nourished and tended. Jesus’ condemning words, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” were reserved for those who had no relationship with him (Matt 7:23). Love and obedience are the evidence of knowing God (Matt 7:21-23; 1 John 2:3; 4:8). The one who truly knows God will know what is on his heart and have a desire to obey him.

Knowing God involves both the intellect and the affections or “heart.” God promises to reveal himself so that his people can know him. “No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord” (Jer 31:34). The Christian not only needs to know *about* God—what he is like and how he works, but he must also know God with his heart. Intellectual knowledge and reason are not enough to lead a person to God or sustain them through their spiritual journey. Two examples serve to illustrate this point—one from the seventeenth century and one from the twenty-first. According to Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know...It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason.”³ John McMillan wrote the following words in 2005 that show the depth of his heart-felt affection for God:

He is jealous for me, loves like a hurricane, I am a tree
Bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy
When all of a sudden I am unaware of these afflictions
Eclipsed by glory and I realize just how beautiful You are
And how great Your affections are for me.

Oh, how He loves us, oh how He love us,
How He loves us all.

³ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*. (Forgotten Books AG, 2010), 72.

We are His portion and He is our prize
Drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes.
If His grace is an ocean, we're all sinking.
Heaven meets earth like an unforeseen kiss
And my heart turns violently inside my chest
I don't have time to maintain these regrets
When I think about, the way....⁴

It is only by personally experiencing Christ that one can come to truly know God. This heart experience is a gift from God himself, and it reflects the desire of God's own heart to be in the affections of his people: "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart" (Jer 24:7). Paul's prayer for the Ephesians also underscores the importance of ongoing knowledge of God: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph 1:17).

Being Transformed

Second, the bride becomes prepared by being transformed into the image of Christ. This second aspect of preparation is related to and dependent on the first (knowing God). Since all Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit and there is no longer a veil between them and God, each is being changed and is beginning to reflect the glory of the One who resides in their hearts. Thus, the more they come to know God, the more their hearts, minds and actions will be transformed. "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). Paul

⁴ John Mark McMillan, "How He Loves," Lyrics, *The Song Inside the Sounds of Breaking Down*. (Integrity's Hosanna! Music), 2005.

exhorts his readers, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2).

Part of this transformation, while accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, is dependent on each person placing him or herself in a position to be changed by the Word of God. The Word has a preeminent role to play in believers’ spiritual lives. It provides the foundation for their salvation and for the ongoing work of sanctification in their lives as growing disciples of Jesus Christ. “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Paul specifically states that the Word is vital in the preparation of the bride of Christ: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:25-27).

This is why *lectio divina* can be a key discipline by which God, in his grace, can sanctify his people and make them more like his Son. The most valuable means that God has given to them for their growth is the process of allowing the Word shape their lives by power of the Holy Spirit. It then can form a template for how they live their everyday lives. This is how the bride of Christ will become prepared. Jesus prays for his disciples then and now, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Thus, believers are changed and sanctified by exposure to the Word of God. When they spend time in the Scriptures, God reveals himself to them and causes them to look more like his Son.

The Role of Lectio Divina in Spiritual Growth

How can the practice of *lectio divina* help Christians know God more deeply and cause transformation in their lives? Two important assumptions undergird the answer to this question. First, every Christian is called to a life of discipleship. Second, both God and the individual have a part to play in this ongoing spiritual formation and life transformation. Christians are called to a life of following Jesus as his disciples (Matt 16:24; 28:19); a life of holiness and obedience (Eph 1:4, 1 Pet 1:15-16; John 8:31; 15:10); and a life of love and fruitfulness (John 13:35; 15:1-8, 16). They cannot, however, transform themselves in their own strength. All their best efforts without the power of the Holy Spirit will result in frustration, guilt and even burnout. But each believer is changed by God's power and life within them (2 Cor 4:7; 12:9; 13:4; Eph 3:15-20; Col 1:10-11; 2 Pet 1:3). They have the Holy Spirit as teacher, counselor, and guide (John 14:16-17, 26; Eph 1:13). They are also responsible to actively cooperate with him in the journey and to make themselves available and open to his transforming work. They are urged to "remain" (John 15:4), to "make every effort" (2 Pet 1:5), to "work out your salvation" (Phil 2:12) – all the while remembering that "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:13).

Growth through Encountering God

No Christian can fully grow into the person they were created to be until they come to have an ongoing, experiential knowledge of the One who loves them. In one of the strongest exhortations Jesus makes to his disciples in the Upper Room discourse, he admonishes them to abide or remain in him in the same way that a fruitful branch remains in the vine (John 15:4-10; cf John 6:56). Without him, they can do nothing. They must

maintain that life-giving connection with the One who is indeed their Life. This is what Jesus prayed for—that his disciples may experience and be connected to that very life and relationship that exists within the Triune God (John 17:21; 23).

In the journey of spiritual formation, this relationship of abiding is the single most important area on which to focus. As one is formed and transformed into the image of Christ, he or she must abide in the vine. This “remaining” and “abiding” is best defined as a relationship of intimacy. To develop this relationship, to grow in this journey, one needs to develop a lifestyle of intimacy with God. At the foundational level, Christian spirituality involves encountering God, experiencing Him and being transformed by that encounter. Alistair McGrath says, “For Christianity, spirituality concerns the living out of the encounter with Jesus Christ.”⁵ It involves the use of all the means that God has made available for cultivating and growing a deep relationship with Christ. *Lectio divina* is a way of praying that encourages this kind of intimate encounter with God. It is important to keep in mind, however, that transformation and even the relationship itself is a gift from God himself. It is an answer to Jesus’ prayer that his disciples may be “in him.” It is not something that is accomplished solely by their own effort or experience. God transforms people and unites them with him as they position their hearts and lives in his presence.

Scripture as the Foundation for Encounter

The Christian life is also a journey of growing in the understanding of who God is and who believers are in and because of him. An unbiblical concept of either of these two can be a stumbling block to growth. God, who has communicated his desire for

⁵ Alistair E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: an Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 2-3.

relationship with his people, has provided Scripture as the primary means of getting to know him and hearing him speak. The Bible is the living Word of God and is meant not only for us to read but for us to allow it to read us. It must be approached on God's terms so that he can reveal himself and do his transforming work through the power of the Holy Spirit. *Lectio divina* is one means to this end because this particular practice of prayer calls for the pray-ers to place themselves under the authority of the Word of God and submit to it. It is a means of entering into and continuing in relationship through his written Word.

In *lectio divina*, people first read the Word and listen to God speaking through the Holy Spirit to them about their life. They experience the transforming power of his Word and his presence. As they are exposed to the Word and place their lives under its authority and power, they are changed: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12-13). As believers see God in Scripture and are brought into his presence, they are transformed into his likeness (2 Cor 3:18). Similarly, exposure to the Word reveals to readers the truth about God's love for them and how he views them. Developing a Biblical concept of one's identity in Christ is an ongoing process of discovering and encountering and believing the truth that is revealed in Scripture. This is a crucial part of the journey of growing in intimacy with God.

The discipline of *lectio divina* lays a foundation and an ongoing structure for making oneself available to be transformed by the Word of God. This is what the goal of *lectio divina* is – encounter with God and transformed lives. Ken Boa shows how *lectio*

divina can bring a needed element of receptivity and openness to the devotional life of a typical evangelical believer:

When evangelicals study Scripture, they typically look more for precepts and principles than for an encounter with God in the depths of their being. The practice of *lectio divina* can correct this lack of balance, because it stresses the reading of Scripture for spiritual formation through receptive openness to God's loving call of grace. *Lectio* is not an intellectual exercise that seeks to control and to gather information, but a voluntary immersion in the Word of God that seeks to receive and to respond. Spiritual reading melds revelation with experience.⁶

Lectio Divina as a Spiritual Discipline

Since Bible reading, prayer, meditation and silence are all part of this model of prayer, *lectio divina* can be a means for some of the most basic of spiritual disciplines to be incorporated into the life of any disciple. It can also be a significant means for growth in the lives of mature believers. *Lectio divina's* combination of biblically informed prayer and encounter with God can bring a balance to groups who emphasize one and minimize the other. A growing relationship with God involves every part of one's being – heart, soul, mind and strength. Therefore the means used to aid in growth must encompass all these areas. Jesus taught that it was important to love God with all of one's being.

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one" answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" (Mark 12:28-30)

Western Christians are very proficient at using their minds and strength. This has been evident since the Scholastic movement of the late Middle Ages. Many, however, are

⁶ Ken Boa. "Devotional Spirituality Part 6: The Practice of Sacred Reading," Monthly Teaching Letter 2395, October 2005. KenBoa.org. http://www.kenboa.org/text_resources/teaching_letters/kens_teaching_letter/2395 (accessed August 8, 2011).

returning to some of the ancient practices developed and used from the very beginnings of Christianity that also encompass the affective side of our relationship with God.

True religion claims the affections as well as the intellect; it is essentially, in Richard Baxter's phrase, "heart-work." Theological truth is for practice. Conceptual knowledge kills if one does not move on from knowing notions to knowing the realities to which they refer – in this case, from knowing about God to a relational acquaintance with God himself.⁷

Gordon Fee addresses this issue from a different angle: exegesis done solely as an academic exercise. He says that exegesis must be accompanied with "a burning heart" and that "true spirituality must precede exegesis as well as flow from it, because without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, all else is mere exercise. To be a good exegete, and consequently a good theologian, one must know the fullness of the Spirit; and that includes a life of prayer."⁸ Scripture also makes it clear that the Lord wants people's hearts involved as well as their minds (Mark 7:6).

It may appear to some that this emphasis on the inner spiritual life is to the neglect of visible fruit and actions on the part of a growing Christian. This is not the case. Often Christians try to bear fruit before they have established a growing relationship with the One who produces the fruit in them. This kind of spirituality leads to burned out, discouraged believers. A Christian needs to take time to abide in the vine before the fruit will grow. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the

⁷ J. I. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 31-32.

⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 6-7.

vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

There are many means available to believers that can help them deepen their relationship with God and grow in maturity and fruitfulness. Spiritual disciplines are many. In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster groups the spiritual disciplines into three categories: inward, outward and corporate, with a total of four disciplines in each category. Adele Calhoun, in her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, lists seven groups and a total of fifty-eight disciplines in all. Prayer, of all the disciplines, stands out as the one that is most essential and serves as the glue that ties all the others together. If it were missing, then the relational aspect of Christian faith would be absent from discipleship. Foster says, “God longs for our presence. And he is inviting you—and me—to come home to...serenity and peace and joy and fellowship and openness and intimacy and acceptance and affirmation. *The key to this home, this heart of God, is prayer* [emphasis added]. It is also the place of deepest intimacy, where we know and are known to the fullest.”⁹

Balance of Intellect and Affect

If the Scriptures are the primary way in which God speaks to his people and prayer is the primary expression of their relationship with God, then the combination of these two seems to be at the heart of Christian spirituality and together form what may be the most crucial discipline of all: scripture-based prayer or *lectio divina*. Thelma Hall summarizes *lectio divina* as:

⁹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), 1-2.

...a holistic way of prayer...leading us to a meeting place with him in our deepest center, his life-giving dwelling place. It begins this movement by introducing us to the power of the word of God in scripture to speak to the most intimate depths of our hearts, to gift and challenge and change us, and to promote genuine spiritual growth and maturity.¹⁰

A common concern that seems to arise when speaking of *lectio divina* is that those who seek to have a deep prayer life are suspicious of serious study and intellectual effort. This issue is addressed by Michael Casey:

It is certainly true that sacred reading takes place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and, in general, of God's Providence. This, however, is no excuse for failing to exercise normal human industry and prudence in arriving at an interpretation that corresponds to the intrinsic meaning of the text. One of the strongest deterrents to long term fidelity to *lectio divina* is a sort of pious laziness that does not permit the mind to become actively engaged.¹¹

Lectio divina combines the intellectual and affective aspects of one's being.

Foster says, "When we come to the Bible with the mind only and not the heart, we separate the written word from the revealed Word—Jesus Christ."¹² Likewise, the reader must also not approach the Bible with the eyes of the heart only and leave out the mind, because it will lead to misunderstanding. Thomas Merton agrees that the mind and the heart—the intellect and the affections—must both be involved for one to grow in their relationship with God:

Contemplation, far from being opposed to theology, is in fact the normal perfection of theology. We must not separate intellectual study of divinely revealed truth and contemplative experience of that truth as if they could never have anything to do with one another. On the contrary they are simply two aspects of the same thing.... Unless they are united there is no fervor, no life and no

¹⁰ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 7.

¹¹ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: the Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MO.: Liguori Publications, 1995), 63.

¹² Richard J. Foster, *Life with God: Reading the Bible For Spiritual Transformation* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 72.

spiritual value in theology; no substance, no meaning and no sure orientation in the contemplative life.¹³

One of the attractions of *lectio divina* is that it can be practiced by any Christian, from the most skilled exegete to the unschooled layperson. While anyone may benefit and grow spiritually through the discipline of *lectio divina*, it cannot be an excuse for fanciful interpretations. Sound exegesis can safeguard and even enhance *lectio divina*. Intellectual examination of Scripture in its historical and grammatical context does not inhibit *lectio divina* if one is opening up one's heart and mind to the life changing power of the Word of God. In this way, exegesis is not devoid of the Holy Spirit or done solely as an academic exercise. *Lectio divina* makes good use of solid exegesis but does not stop there. It answers Fee's concern: "Theology that does not begin and end in worship is not biblical at all.... In the same way, I want to insist that the ultimate aim of all true exegesis is spirituality."¹⁴ *Lectio divina* is, at its core, an integration of the truth of the Word and devotion of the heart. *Lectio divina* promotes a lifestyle of abiding in the vine and allowing the life of Jesus to produce fruit in the lives of his followers. Jesus' parable of the sower highlights the importance of the Word of God and the condition of the heart that receives the Word (Matt 13:18-23).

Lectio Divina—An Introduction

In order to develop a model for Scripture-based prayer, first I want to examine *lectio divina* and then demonstrate how it can successfully be used in the lives of believers both to grow in knowledge of God and to be transformed into his image. It is

¹³ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1972), 254-255.

¹⁴ Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 5.

important to keep in mind, however, that though a person desires spiritual formation, “doing” *lectio divina* or some other discipline is not what forms or transforms them – it is encountering the person of God. At the center of this transformational process is the love of God for his people and their response to that love – falling deeply in love with God. It is this experience of God’s love that transforms them. The presence of God himself is the power for transformation. When people encounter God, they are filled with his love and are able to go back into the world and love their neighbor. “We love because he first loved us” (1John 4:19).

As indicated in Chapter One, *lectio divina* is an ancient practice of praying the Scriptures and has been used in various forms for over 1500 years. In the early monastic tradition Scripture was read aloud in a group setting due to the scarcity of written materials. St. Benedict (ca. 480-550), an Italian monk, advocated its use as a spiritual discipline in his famous *Rule* for monks.¹⁵ Eventually, it came to include four stages: reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), praying (*oratio*), and contemplation (*contemplatio*). *Lectio divina* involves entering into a conversation with God and is very different than Bible study that is done for the sake of gaining information about God. Its aim is to nourish and deepen one’s relationship with God. It helps people to pray with their thoughts grounded in Scripture and with their hearts open to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to them through the Word. Through the centuries *lectio divina* has been practiced in many different forms, by both groups and individuals.

¹⁵ St. Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict in English* 48:1-4;10,13-18;22-23. Edited by Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982), 69-70.

In the twelfth century Guigo II¹⁶ wrote *The Ladder of Monks*, in which he describes the steps of *lectio divina* and how they are related to and dependent on each other:

Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one's powers on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one's own reason for knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is the heart's devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good. Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.

Reading seeks for the sweetness of a blessed life, meditation, perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading, as it were, puts food into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes.¹⁷

Alister McGrath's explanation of Guigo's four-stage reading of the Biblical text is particularly helpful:

Guigo argues that we begin by reading the text of Scripture, in full expectation that we shall encounter something of God in doing so. This leads us on to meditate on what we find – not in the sense of emptying our minds of everything, but rather allowing our minds to focus and concentrate upon the meaning and imagery of the text, with all external thoughts being excluded. This leads us to prayer as the only appropriate response to what we encounter. Finally, this leads to a quiet entrance into the presence of God in contemplation.¹⁸

M. Basil Pennington's concise description is also useful as we look at *lectio divina*: "As we listen to the Word (*lectio*), a word, a phrase, a sentence may well strike us, and we let it reverberate within, opening and expanding, forming and shaping (*meditatio*), calling forth varied responses (*oratio*) until finally we simply rest in the

¹⁶ Guigo II was the ninth Prior of the Grand Chartreuse, the mother house of the Carthusian Order.

¹⁷ Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks: A Letter On the Contemplative Life and Twelve Meditations*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 68-69.

¹⁸ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: an Introduction*, 85.

Reality to which it all leads (*contemplatio*).”¹⁹ The ultimate goal in *lectio divina* is God himself. Although enlightening the mind and motivating the will are important, encountering the living Word is our primary purpose. Pennington says, “We come seeking the experience of the presence of the living God, to be with him and to allow him to be with us in whatever way he wishes.”²⁰

The Four Stages of Lectio Divina

It is important for the purposes of this project to look at each of the four stages of *lectio divina* in detail and consider their relationship to each other.

Reading (*Lectio*)

The first stage of *lectio divina* is reading. For the purposes of this thesis-project, I am speaking specifically of reading the Scriptures. Reading is approached with the knowledge that one is listening to the living Word of God. In *lectio divina*, a short passage is slowly read several times, allowing time to savor the words and let them sink in deeply. This is the opposite of reading quickly in order to finish a certain amount of text. Fast reading only lets the words go skin deep. In *lectio divina*, one reads for depth, not breadth. The goal of this kind of reading is not to gain information; it is to listen to the Word of God, cultivating the ability to attend deeply to what God is saying. St. Benedict calls it attending “with the ear of your heart.”²¹ In this step we try to follow the example of Samuel, who said “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:10). This

¹⁹ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 27.

²⁰ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 27.

²¹ St. Benedict. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982) 15.

kind of reading and listening involves our intellect and at the same time is a prayerful and reverent act. We are deliberately and consciously making space for God and turning to him with our minds and hearts. Listening to the voice of God involves being attentive to his sometimes still, small voice. Like the prophet Elijah, one may hear God, not in the earthquake or fire but in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:11-12).

This kind of reading runs counter to the Western mindset in which people usually read for information with the goal of finishing a certain portion of material. The reading stage of *lectio divina* involves the freedom to read a short passage without obligation to hurriedly move on. The one who reads is responding to a Person who desires to speak, and he may do so through a sentence or two or even a phrase or single word. The reader's part is to quiet his heart so that he can hear God's Word to him. He listens to the Word in the spirit of silence and awe. As one realizes God is beginning to speak, reading begins to move into the second stage, meditation. Each stage or movement is part of a continuously deepening prayer and encounter with God.

Meditation (*Meditatio*)

It follows naturally that one moves from reading to meditation as one begins to savor the truths that God is revealing. An example from Scripture is the Virgin Mary, who pondered in her heart what she saw and heard of Jesus (Luke 2:19). The Psalmist knew the delights of meditation on Word of God: "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Ps 119:97). The people of God were even commanded to meditate on the Word continually so that they would know and obey God's will for them: "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and

successful” (Josh 1:8-9). It is a natural progression that as one reads and is immersed in the Word of God, one begins to think about it and consider its meaning, “I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word” (Ps 119:15-16).

Richard Peace says that meditation “is not an esoteric art...in fact, it’s quite natural. It’s something we engage in all the time though we may not call it by that name. To meditate is to think about a subject. It is to focus on a topic, turning it over in your mind until it becomes clear or until you have new insight. Meditation is a form of reflection; it is a way of learning.”²² Thelma Hall describes meditation as “a discursive reasoning process in which words, events, etc., are prayerfully pondered and reflected on with the object of drawing from them some personal meaning or moral. It is basically an activity of the intellect and reason, aided by grace.”²³

Foster tries to dispel concerns about the legitimacy and reliability of Christian meditation. He insists that when the imagination is used, care must be taken so that manipulation, self-deception and evil influence will not occur. The way to avoid all of these is “for us to be thrown in utter dependence upon God in these matters. We are seeking to think God’s thoughts after him, to delight in his presence, to desire his truth and his way. The more we live in this way, the more God utilizes our imagination for his good purposes.”²⁴ Similarly, Houston writes:

²² Richard Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture: a Spiritual Formation Study Guide*, Rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1998), 67.

²³ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep For Words*, 9.

²⁴ Foster, *Prayer*, 148.

This is where Christian meditation differs so sharply from Transcendental Meditation...All our meditation depends on the work Jesus did for us in giving us access to God's presence. Just as the writer of Psalm 1 delighted in the law of the Lord, so all true meditation focuses on God's revelation through the Bible, and through Jesus Christ.²⁵

These descriptions of meditation should help put to rest the fears of New Age infiltration that may be roused when the word "meditation" is mentioned in evangelical Christian circles.

Christian meditation can take the form of whatever is helpful to the individual.

Some may use their imagination while others may use a journal to reflect on what they have read. Baker explains how believers need not be afraid of the use of the imagination:

Neither the ancients nor our more recent forebears had resistance to the idea of making their imagination into "sacred space" in service of their faith. Long before New Age distortions, the imagination was a vital part of spiritual formation. Since faith is the apprehension of unseen realities, imagination, when directed toward Christ, is one of faith's greatest allies. When we "walk by faith, not by sight," we do it through the human faculty of the imagination, envisioning what we know to be true by faith but that is invisible to the eye. In gospel meditation, unseen truths of the faith become experienced realities.²⁶

The constant factor, no matter what means are used, is that one is drawn to God in some way during this process of prayerful reflection. For the Psalmist, meditating on God's love for him was associated with being in the presence of God: "Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love" (Ps 48:9). Peace says, "I experience the presence of God or the love of God or the peace of God as I meditate."²⁷ As with every step in *lectio divina*, it is important to remember that any form of prayer is a gift

²⁵ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 260.

²⁶ Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1998), 116.

²⁷ Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 68.

from God; one's response is just that, a response to communication that has been initiated by the Holy Spirit, not by oneself.

There are different views on meditation depending on whether it is seen as an active discursive model or more of a receptive process. There are dangers to both and they must be addressed because of the culture and times in which we live. According to Guigo, meditation is a careful, active examination of each point of the text. The danger here lies in getting caught up in our own thoughts and ideas and clever conclusions. This is a very easy path to take for today's intellectually-oriented Christian. Pennington says, "All our thoughts, ideas, and insights, all our creations are in danger of becoming idols. We have to be ready to break them to pieces and pass beyond them to the Reality that they of their nature point to."²⁸ The receptive model is approached with great caution by modern evangelicals because of the influence of New Age and eastern religious mysticism.²⁹ It must be made clear that Christian meditation, as set forth in the steps of *lectio divina*, is not an emptying of the mind or entering some kind of trance-like state. It is a filling of the mind with the Word of God and letting him speak through it. There is both an active and a passive element to meditation. Pennington describes the latter as "a more receptive process allowing the Word to break open and reform us."³⁰

Reading and meditation are part of a continuum of relationship and communion with God. Jean-Pierre de Caussade shows how they flow together and intertwine. He says

²⁸ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 60.

²⁹ Some object to meditation and contemplation on the grounds that they are unbiblical and border on eastern religious practices. This is the very reason that McGrath disallows the use of the word "mysticism" when describing spirituality. He uses "knowing God" and "experiencing God" to describe important aspects of Christian spirituality (McGrath, 4-6).

³⁰ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 61.

to read “quietly, slowly, word for word to enter into the subject more with the heart than the mind.”³¹ Then he encourages pausing frequently: “From time to time make short pauses to allow these truths time to flow through all the recesses of the soul and to give occasion for the operation of the Holy Spirit who, during these peaceful pauses and times of silent attention, engraves and imprints these heavenly truths in the heart.”³² At this point, reading and meditation are almost inseparable and the reader should not be in a hurry. Caussade continues his instruction: “Rest peacefully before God. Should this peace and rest last for a longer time it will be all the better. When you find that your mind wanders resume your reading and continue thus, frequently renewing these same pauses.”³³

The stage of meditation is a crucial aspect of our life of discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer highlights the importance of meditation in receiving the Word of God into the heart and letting its personal meaning for the individual take hold.

The word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love. And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation. Do not look for new thoughts and new connections in the text, as if you were preaching! Do not ask “How shall I pass it on?” but “What does it say to me?” Then ponder this Word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you.³⁴

³¹ Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (1921; Repr., Kessinger Publishing, n.d.), 187.

³² Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, 213.

³³ Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, 187.

³⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way To Freedom: Letters, Lectures, and Notes 1935-1939, from the Collected Works, Volume II* ed. Edwin H. Robertson, trans. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 59.

The Word of God transforms and renews the minds of believers and gives them a firm foundation for their lives. They learn about God – who he is and how he works in the world and in their lives. They also learn the truth about themselves – their purpose and significance in creation and in life. A Christian's prayer, however, must not remain on an intellectual level or it is not genuine prayer. The goal is more than just knowledge about God. It is knowing God himself. In *lectio divina*, this begins to occur as one moves from meditation to prayer and the living Word touches the heart and one responds to the Lord at a deep inner level.

Prayer (*Oratio*)

Praying with Scripture draws one into a deeper encounter with the living God through his Word. One allows the word that has just been pondered to touch and change one's heart at the deepest level. In this stage of *lectio divina*, meditation on the Scripture passage leads directly into a dialogue with God where one takes time to speak intimately with him. One may begin this conversation by speaking the words of sacred Scripture back to God. One also may ask a question of the Lord such as, "What are you saying to me?" Listening is an integral part of prayer. It is important for the one praying to take time to wait for God to respond and speak to his heart. The one who prays can be confident that the Lord will speak: "I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer" (Ps 17:6). This stage helps dispel the popular idea that prayer is supposed to consist primarily of people talking and asking for things while God listens. In *lectio divina*, one learns to listen and to be comfortable with silence. God will speak to the heart that is quiet before him.

The listening aspect of prayer is found throughout Scripture. It is so important that it is even associated with life itself, “Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, *listen to his voice*, [emphasis added] and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deut 30:19-20). God, the Father, says only one thing at Jesus’ transfiguration, thus stressing the importance of the words: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mark 9:7). Jesus himself tells the disciples how important it is that they listen and be able to distinguish his voice: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27-28).

Prayer is not a distinct, separate step that one deliberately chooses. It is a gift and a level of communication between God and the individual. I have said that *lectio divina* is a method of prayer. Michael Casey says,

Fundamentally, it is the atmosphere of prayer that penetrates every aspect of holy reading that makes it distinctive. Prayer is not suddenly born at the third stage. Rather, prayer accompanies us as we open the book and settle our mind, as we read the page and ponder its meaning. Prayer is the meaning of *lectio divina*; that is why the exercise of sacred reading is sometimes said to be a technique of prayer.³⁵

This pervasive atmosphere of prayer is crucial to our relationship with God. According to E.M. Bounds, “Without prayer the Christian life, robbed of its sweetness and beauty, becomes cold and formal and dead; but rooted in the secret place where God meets and walks and talks with his own, it grows into such a testimony of Divine power that all men will feel its influence and be touched by the warmth of its love.”³⁶

³⁵ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 61.

³⁶ Edward M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer*, CCEL, Public domain. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bounds/purpose.XIII.html> (accessed August 8, 2011).

Some distinction can be made between meditating and prayer. At a certain point, prayer moves from being centered in the intellect and imagination to being prayer from the heart. It happens as believers open up themselves to God. Pennington says, “Almost naturally, this ongoing meditation calls forth again and again a response: thanksgiving, praise, petition, repentance, adoration. Prayer is any and every kind of communication with our God who loves us.”³⁷ As people move from meditation to prayer, they are making an active effort “to keep our hearts open to him and to put ourselves at the disposal of his Spirit, preparing the way for God’s action to supersede our own.”³⁸

Even though I am attempting to describe what happens in the various steps of *lectio divina*, at some point it becomes difficult to quantify. Prayer is a movement of the heart, and this opening of the heart to God may not be able to be expressed with words. Hall says, “It is difficult to give an example of this prayer of *Oratio*, because it is the unique and spontaneous voice of the heart which is touched by God and reaches out to him in ardent love.”³⁹ In prayer, believers experience the same longing and desire for God himself that the Psalmist expresses, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:1-2). David also experienced this longing for God in prayer, “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps 63:1).

³⁷ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 63.

³⁸ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 42.

³⁹ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 44.

This increase of desire for God is awakened in prayer as one encounters him in intimate conversation, inviting him to do his work in one's heart. The realization of weakness and sinfulness drives a person to an even deeper longing for him and his purifying love and grace. Prayer is a humble seeking and desiring after what God has revealed through his Word. It is the soul calling out with longing for that which it cannot attain on its own.

Contemplation (*Contemplatio*)

This stage of *lectio divina* gives the believer the opportunity for an intimate time of communion with the Lord. One simply rests in the presence of the God who loves him and invites him into his transforming embrace. God himself calls the one who prays into this silence of heart, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Ps 46:10). David longed for times of being in the presence of God and gazing upon his beauty (Ps 27:4). Jesus went frequently to be alone with his Father. There are times in all loving relationships when words are not necessary. In this stage one lets go of his or her own words and, in silence, simply enjoys being in the presence of God. This is where true transformation of hearts and lives occurs.

The goal of *lectio divina* is contemplation. Authors offer several phrases to describe what is meant by contemplation: "It is the love of just *being with*," "To abide with God within his temple,"⁴⁰ "The communication of love between God and us," "The experience of being with the Beloved," "The normal residence of those who seek the love

⁴⁰ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 64-65.

of God.”⁴¹ Contemplation has recently come to be negatively associated with eastern mysticism and other non-Christian exercises. It has also been thought to be the activity of only a privileged few who spend their whole lives in the desert or a monastery. This is a far cry from what has been meant through its history in Christian spirituality.

The word contemplation had a specific meaning for the first 16 centuries of the Christian era. St. Gregory the Great summed up this meaning at the end of the 6th century as the knowledge of God that is impregnated with love. For Gregory, contemplation was both the fruit of reflecting on the Word of God in scripture and a precious gift of God. He referred to contemplation as “resting in God.” In this “resting,” the mind and heart are not so much seeking God, as beginning to experience what they have been seeking. This state is not the suspension of all activity, but the reduction of many acts and reflections to a single act or thought in order to sustain one’s consent to God’s presence and action.⁴²

Contemplation is sometimes called “union with God.” Richard Foster points out that many well-known saints maintain that this union with God is the goal of one’s Christian experience: “Julian of Norwich declares, ‘The whole reason why we pray is to be united into the vision and contemplation of him to whom we pray.’ Bonaventure, a follower of Saint Francis, says that our final goal is ‘union with God.’”⁴³ Pennington writes:

We come to lectio with a great longing for union, the union we call contemplation. We dare to come to lectio with heartfelt longing truly to hear our Friend, truly to understand, that we might understand him and be more and more one with him...Our lectio is a time that comes to be filled with what is the greatest joy of human life, a time of being with our most intimate Friend.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 97.

⁴² Contemplative Outreach. “The Christian Contemplative Tradition,” http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_history_tradition (accessed August 8, 2011).

⁴³ Foster, *Prayer*, 159.

⁴⁴ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 78.

Thelma Hall describes contemplation as “a ‘resting’ in God, or a ‘loving gaze’ upon him, or a ‘knowing beyond knowing,’ or a ‘rapt attention’ to God. Contemplation transcends the thinking and reasoning of meditation, as well as the emotions and ‘feelings’ of the affective faculties. It is basically a prayer and experience of pure faith.”⁴⁵ Chan suggests that we begin by diligent reading of the Word out of which spiritual reading can grow and, in turn, nurture a “meditative habit of mind.” He also agrees that the goal is union with God or contemplation. “Progress in meditation is evident when discursive thought (usually accompanied by vocal prayers, colloquies, soliloquies and so on) are gradually replaced by ‘wordless’ prayer, rapt attention, awe and silence before God. The end is Christian perfection or union with God, the realization of ‘man’s chief end.’”⁴⁶

Contemplation is prayer that a person does not control or achieve; it is a relationship initiated by God himself, and it leads to divine union. Contemplative awareness of God is a pure gift from God and not a result of anything a person does. It is a spiritual experience and a process of interior transformation. Anyone can experience resting in God’s presence provided they open their heart and mind to God. *Lectio divina* is not a mysterious method of prayer reserved for an elite few. Pennington asserts, “All those who regularly meet the Lord in *lectio* will go beyond all the thoughts and ideas and concepts, no matter how fascinating they are, and enter into a contemplative union with God in Christ. They will come to have the mind and heart of Christ....”⁴⁷ At times a

⁴⁵ Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 9.

⁴⁶ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: a Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1998), 171.

⁴⁷ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 90.

believer will be aware of this transforming work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. At other times it is a matter of faith and trust that God is with him and transforming him according to the promise that God's Word will bring about his will in our lives, "...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11). God also promises to complete the sanctifying work that he began in each believer (Phil 1:6).

Here, in contemplation, God satisfies the ultimate longing, thirst and need of the human soul. It is in God himself that hearts are satisfied. Augustine said, "...you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless till it finds its rest in you."⁴⁸ It is impossible to define the moment that contemplation or union with God begins to take place. Even Guigo describes its occurrence with metaphorical language to help people understand:

The Lord...does not wait until the longing soul has said all its say, but breaks in upon the middle of its prayer, runs to meet it in all haste, sprinkled with sweet heavenly dew, anointed with the most precious perfumes, and He restores the weary soul, He slakes its thirst, He feeds its hunger, He makes the soul forget all earthly things: by making it die to itself He gives it new life in a wonderful way, and by making it drunk He brings it back to its true senses.⁴⁹

M. Gildas' analysis of the words of Bernard of Clairvaux also helps us gain additional insight into the gift of contemplation:

According to St. Bernard (De Consider., lib. I, c. vii), (contemplation) is the highest form of human worship, as it is essentially an act of adoration and of utter self-surrender of man's whole being. The soul in contemplation is a soul lying prostrate before God, convinced of and confessing its own nothingness, and His worthiness to receive all love and glory and honor and blessings from those He has created. It is a soul lost in admiration and love of the Eternal Beauty, the sight of which though but a feeble reflection, fill it with a joy naught else in the world

⁴⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. and ed. Philip Burton (New York: Alfred A Knopf, Everyman's Library, 2001), 5.

⁴⁹ Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks*, 74.

can give — a joy which, far more eloquently than speech, testifies that the soul rates that Beauty above all other beauties, and finds in It the completion of all its desires. It is the jubilant worship of the whole heart, mind, and soul, the worship “in spirit and in truth” of the “true adorers,” such as the Father seeks to adore Him (John 4:23).⁵⁰

As a believer receives the gift of contemplation, gazing with awe upon the beauty of God, he is waiting and listening for the still small voice of God. This is what it means to be still and know that God is God. It is, as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, coming to know the love of Christ and being filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:18-19).

Lectio Divina as a Process

Although I have divided the stages of *lectio divina* and discussed each one separately, it is also important to point out that they are movements along a continuum of relationship and prayer. Guigo explains how each of the four steps of *lectio divina* is joined to the other:

One precedes another, not only in the order of time but of causality. Reading comes first, and is, as it were, the foundation; it provides the subject matter we must use for meditation. Meditation considers more carefully what is to be sought after; it digs, as it were, for treasure which it finds and reveals, but since it is not in meditation's power to seize upon the treasure, it directs us to prayer. Prayer lifts itself up to God with all its strength, and begs for the treasure it longs for, which is the sweetness of contemplation. Contemplation when it comes rewards the labors of the other three; it inebriates the thirsting soul with the dew of heavenly sweetness. Reading is an exercise of the outward senses; meditation is concerned with the inward understanding; prayer is concerned with desire; contemplation outstrips every faculty.⁵¹

Lectio divina is not a *method* of prayer but an organic process which parallels the growth of “any intimate love relationship – through a continuum of knowing, trusting,

⁵⁰ Gildas, M. (1907). St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02498d.htm> (accessed August 8, 2011).

⁵¹ Guigo II, *Ladder of Monks*, 79.

desiring, surrendering our defenses and fears, and ultimately our very selves to the Beloved.”⁵² This process corresponds to the four steps of *lectio divina* in which prayer begins with reading the Scripture and progresses to deepening reflection, prayer and finally resting in the presence of God. Casey writes, “*Lectio divina* is an expression of my search for God. Sacred reading can be considered ‘successful’ only if it causes me to drop my defenses and allow God to touch my heart and change my life.”⁵³ It requires receptivity, humility and willingness to listen and change and obey.

Guigo’s system may seem somewhat fixed or structured, but it provides a good foundation upon which to build the practice of *lectio divina*. Michael Casey points out some important considerations to keep in mind when trying to define and implement *lectio divina* as a spiritual discipline. He says that the “system” that Guigo outlines is just one possible way for believers to experience communion with God. “It makes no claim to being the only way to God.”⁵⁴ It is also not to be regarded as a fixed, rigid method that produces certain results if followed in a strict manner. He says further, “Contemplation can never be seen as the outcome of a process. It remains a gift from God that is not automatically associated with particular human acts.”⁵⁵

In contemporary American culture where an easy fix or an instant answer is highly valued, *lectio divina* should not be viewed as such. Even though we might like to have four steps that are easily defined and always produce the desired results, *lectio*

⁵² Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 28.

⁵³ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 63.

⁵⁴ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 58.

⁵⁵ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 59.

divina involves relationship with the living God who cannot be manipulated or controlled.

The worst thing we could possibly do is to regard the treatise (Guigo's system) as a recipe book and attempt to cook up some contemplation for ourselves. The 'system' Guigo expounds is not rigid and prescriptive. Its stages are more like the colors of a rainbow than bureaucratic categories. The different moments ebb and flow; sometimes they overlap, at others they drift apart. In the various seasons of our life we can expect different blends of elements: at one stage more reading, at another absorption in quiet satisfies all our spiritual hunger.⁵⁶

This insight from Casey is extremely important when considering how to implement *lectio divina* in a church context. It will be crucial that people understand that contemplative prayer cannot be manipulated or controlled like a program that is designed to produce a certain desired result.

Lectio Divina and Relational Revelation

Earlier it was shown that Scripture is replete with the language of relationship and evidence of God's desire to have the most intimate of relationships with his people. The very image of his self-revelation in Jesus Christ is at the heart of Christian theology. In every way, God is a revelatory and relational God. This can be seen in the relationship among the three persons of the Trinity and in all of salvation history. God exists in relationship and God, from the beginning of creation has initiated, pursued and restored relationship with humankind. Relationship is at the core of who people are as human beings made in the image of God, and revelation is at the core of how they relate to God as creator. Jesus defines the very core of the relationship between God and man as being a relationship of love:

⁵⁶ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 58-59.

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matt 22:36-38)

The relational nature of God is closely linked to his revelatory nature. The very heart of the Gospel is God’s self-revelation in Jesus. Jesus said that he himself has revealed what we need to know about God the Father. “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” (John 14:9-10). God, who is the greatest communicator, has provided his written word so that people may know him. The revelational and relational aspects of God’s nature are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to separate them or to attempt to address one without dealing with the other. Bruce Demarest says, “Growing Christians need not choose between faith in biblical truths and life in God’s presence. Both are essential”⁵⁷ The purpose of Scripture is not only to provide people with propositional truth, but to encounter them at a relational level with the One who is Truth himself. Scripture leads people into relationship. Demarest voices his concern over the result of placing head knowledge over heart experience: “A rigorous system of formal propositions, elevated above truth experienced in the heart, borders on idolatry. Head knowledge of God does not automatically translate into spiritual vitality.”⁵⁸ *Lectio divina*, because it is centered in the written revelation of God

⁵⁷ Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999), 83.

⁵⁸ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 84.

and leads to deeper relationship with God, corresponds to his self-revelatory and relational nature.

Conclusion

I am proposing that *lectio divina* is also a primary means by which Christians may obtain both of the goals of which we spoke earlier: knowing God and being transformed. The renewal of the mind and the transformation of the heart occur in a wonderful way when people allow the Word of God to go deep into their lives. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” (Rom 12:2). For the purposes of *lectio divina*, believers must move away from what Robert Mulholland calls “informational” reading of the Scriptures to “formational” reading. The point is to meet God in the text, not to read the text in order to gain more head knowledge. Peterson says:

There is only one way of reading that is congruent with our Holy Scriptures, writing that trusts in the power of words to penetrate our lives and create truth and beauty and goodness, writing that requires a reader who...does not always remain bent over his pages; he often leans back and closes his eyes over a line he has been reading again, and its meaning spreads through his blood. This is the kind of reading...that enters our souls as food enters our stomachs, spreads through our blood, and becomes holiness and love and wisdom.⁵⁹

Lectio divina is an excellent spiritual discipline for those who desire to grow in experiential intimacy with God. Pennington explains how this is true: “We come to *lectio* not so much seeking ideas, concepts, insights, or even motivating graces; we come to *lectio* seeking God himself and nothing less than God.”⁶⁰ *Lectio divina* is essentially

⁵⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 4.

⁶⁰ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 27.

prayer at a deep experiential level. The beauty of *lectio divina* is that it is based on the Word of God. The experiential element of prayer is undergirded by the truth of the Word and guards against falling into error or eccentricity. Pennington reminds us, “We are gifted with that most precious and direct communication of the inspired Word of God. We turn to it in particular to hear.”⁶¹

Christians cannot fully grow into the people they were created to be until they come to an experiential knowledge of the One who loves them. Similarly, in order to grow in intimacy with God, they need to see themselves as he sees them. This is an ongoing process of discovering and encountering and believing the truth that is revealed in Scripture. As was asserted earlier, the Christian life is a journey of growing in the understanding of who God is and who his people are in and because of him. God’s Word has the power to reveal truth, convict of sin and lay bare the motives of hearts (Heb 4:12). It also has the power to change lives and produce fruit when hearts are open and humble (Luke 8:4-15). Christians need to go as deep in things of the heart as they do in things of the mind. It is important that the church put as much emphasis on developing a relationship with God as it does on intellectual pursuit of knowledge about God. This would result in fewer shallow and dissatisfied Christians. Demarest’s synopsis of the problem (addressed in Chapter One) of Christians who have not progressed beyond the typical program-oriented discipleship model, helps lead to the conclusion that *lectio divina* may well be an important bridge between the intellect and the devotion of the heart.

Evangelicals have rightly stressed the use of the mind in listening to God, but sadly they have not always realized that God’s words must penetrate more deeply

⁶¹ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 29.

than the mind, to affect conscience, heart and will as well. The result has been a generation of evangelicals with a good knowledge of Christian doctrine, but with a shallowness in spirituality and little realization of the depth of fellowship and intimacy with himself to which God calls us.... We need to learn again how to bridge the gulf between intellectual understanding and heartwarming devotion.⁶²

The spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* provides a path to follow on this journey of encountering God and being transformed by his Word. *Lectio divina* also fulfills the need for prayer to be biblically based. Prayer that is based on Scripture will touch not only the intellect but also the heart and provide a motivation for prayer that is theologically sound and grounded in a relationship of love with God. In this kind of prayer, as Christians turn to God, the veil is taken away, and they are formed and transformed into the image of the One who loves them and desires to be with them for all eternity. "But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

From the beginning, *lectio divina* was not just a method, but a description of encountering God through His Word. It is an attempt to break down and put into words what happens when human beings come to God's Word and drink deeply of its truth while opening their lives to its transforming power. It begins as an act of the will and ends as a gift from God. It is conversation with the living God— reading, listening, meditating, and experiencing his presence.

Christian discipleship must combine the best of spirituality and theology. Leaders need to find practical ways to integrate spirituality and theology so that people will be

⁶² Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 87.

able to grow in their knowledge of God and, at the same time, increase in fervor and love for God. The various means that God makes available (such as Bible study, prayer, fasting, solitude, confession, simplicity and worship) must never be allowed to become intellectual activities or an end in themselves. The disciplines must always be dependent on the grace of God to do the transforming work in believers' lives as they open themselves to him. The focus must continually be abiding in the vine.

Relationship with God is the foundation and motivation for all Christian spiritual formation. Deepening and growing in this relationship with God is every Christian's priority. The use of *lectio divina* as a means for spiritual formation in the local church context is based on this two-part premise: that at the center of Christian spirituality is a relationship and that Scripture is the primary means by which God makes himself known to his people. *Lectio divina* is a valuable spiritual discipline by which Christians can come to know God, and know who they are in him, and be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. In *Lectio divina* Christians open up themselves to God, letting him set the agenda. It teaches them to listen, wait and practice the presence of God. *Lectio divina* emphasizes a reflective mindset and a receptive, humble heart. Getting to know God is the Christian's motivation and destiny. He will use *lectio divina* to teach about himself, speak through his Word and transform hearts and lives.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.”

—Jeremiah 6:16

The primary question that I will explore in this chapter is how various authors perceive *lectio divina* as a means of spiritual growth. I will look specifically at their perspectives on the role of Scripture in prayer, the goal of spiritual growth and attitudes and dispositions needed for fruitful prayer. I will survey the authors’ views of how *lectio divina* can be helpful in obtaining the goal of our spiritual lives and I will examine how they define the four steps of *lectio divina* (reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation) and why they may be an effective and meaningful way of deepening one’s prayer life. I will survey literature on *lectio divina* from both Catholic and evangelical Protestant traditions. The survey will cover authors such as Peterson, Foster, Willard, Yancey, Peace, Casey, and Benedict XVI. Classic authors such as Guigo, St. Benedict, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross will also be taken into account.

There is a general agreement among authors regarding the value of *lectio divina* as part of the devotional life of believers. The definition and the actual implementation of the discipline however, vary widely, even within similar groups. A section of this review will be given to each of the four stages or movements of *lectio divina*, so that the different opinions of how they are approached can be understood. Attention will especially be given to the stages of meditation and contemplation since they are the ones most easily misunderstood.

Introduction

Lectio divina is a time-tested way of prayer that assists people who are praying to position their hearts to receive the Word of God in Scripture, to listen to God speaking to them personally, to encounter the living God, and to be transformed in his presence.

Kenneth Leech describes this kind of contemplative encounter with God, when one is overwhelmed by the love of God and encounters God in a “simple gaze” of love, as “the very essence of the Christian life.”¹ He goes on to say, “So the aim of methods of prayer is to allow the conditions to emerge in which the light may shine clearly and without interruption, the conditions in which the soul is led to the clear vision of God.”² Howard Baker suggests that meditative prayer helps move people from complacency to passion as they are exposed to the reality of Jesus in the gospels. He says:

When this path has done its work, I do not simply possess the word of Christ; rather it takes possession of me....In this direct experience with Christ through Gospel meditation, we feast on the Bread of Life and are “filled up to all the fullness of God.” And so we are moved out of disinterest in God into a new strength, vitality, and passion for Him.³

Most authors emphasize that Scripture must be the foundation for any kind of contemplative prayer. This is why *lectio divina*, with its emphasis on the Word of God, is ideal for those desiring spiritual growth and transformation. M. Robert Mulholland stresses the need for Scripture to be transformative in the lives of believers. He says that one of the principles of the deeper life is:

¹ Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: Spiritual Direction in the Modern World*. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2001), 179.

² Leech, *Soul Friend*, 179.

³ Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 119.

...for the Scripture to become a place of transforming encounter with God. Read slowly, sink down into the text, let it become the context of your life at that moment. Listen to what God may be saying to you in that passage. Reflect on how this Word might become incarnate in your life in the world. If you receive a strong word from God in the passage, meditate on how living that word will look in your life, and commit yourself to God to incarnate that word in your living.⁴

Scripture, prayer and quiet listening go hand in hand in nurturing intimacy and coming to the place of transforming encounter with God. Mulholland speaks of the necessity of nurturing quiet in our lives and simply being in God's loving presence:

This "quiet, persistent practice" begins in the action of becoming a weaned child at our mother's breast (Ps 131) in the daily times of aloneness with God. As that deep offering of our self to God in love begins to become habituated in our relationship with God, that centeredness begins to infuse our life outside the times of aloneness with God. Loving union with God, the life hidden with God in Christ, begins to become the reality of our life in the world in all relationships and situations. Gradually, probably without our awareness, God works a transformation within us....⁵

The Goal of the Journey: Loving God

In order to discuss *lectio divina* as a catalyst for spiritual growth, it is necessary to identify the ultimate goal toward which a believer strives in that growth. David Benner states that there are three master goals of the Christian's journey: "1.) becoming a great lover, 2.) becoming whole and holy, and 3.) becoming our true self-in-Christ."⁶ While it is true that all three of these are indeed important, only one of them can be the primary goal of our Christian life. There can be only one "master goal": loving God. All holiness must be an outflow of growing in love for God. Transformation in holiness and

⁴ M. Robert Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 161.

⁵ Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 149.

⁶ David G. Benner, *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002), 32.

wholeness comes as a result of relationship and must be secondary to the primary purpose of a Christian's life: to glorify God and enjoy him forever.⁷

One reason it is necessary to clarify the goal of the journey is that the means of getting there will differ depending on where one is headed. If the goal is primarily personal holiness rather than growing in a love relationship with God, then more emphasis will be given to self than to loving God. Sanctification happens in the context of a genuine love relationship with God. *Lectio divina* is nothing more than a spiritual discipline that helps cultivate that love relationship. Another reason to clarify the goal of the journey is to avoid the trap of thinking that a person can accomplish transformation by their own effort. *Lectio divina* is not something that a person does so that they will become holy; it is a way of prayer that draws them into the transforming presence of God and nurtures that relationship so that they know him better and fall more deeply in love with him. Benner says it well: "Only love is capable of genuine transformation. Will power is inadequate. Even spiritual effort is not up to the task. If we are to become great lovers, we must return again and again to the great love of the Great Lover."⁸ So it is in this love relationship that a person is transformed and made holy and able to love others. If *lectio divina* is to be a catalyst for spiritual growth, then it must first and foremost help lead one into deeper intimacy with God. Spiritual growth, transformation, sanctification, and wholeness are the result of the growing love relationship between God and people. Benner describes the kind of transformation that comes from first loving God:

⁷ Presbyterian Church in America, *The Westminster Standards: The Westminster Confession of Faith, The Larger Catechism, The Shorter Catechism* (Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, n.d.), 71.

⁸ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 34.

I meditate on his love, allowing my focus to be on him and his love for me, not me and my love for him. And slowly things begin to change. My heart slowly begins to warm and soften. I begin to experience new levels of love for God. And slowly, almost imperceptibly, I begin to see others through God's eyes of love. I begin to experience God's love for others.⁹

Another way of looking at the ultimate purpose of the Christian life is to speak of it in terms of "union with God." In his discussion of John 17:20-23, Mulholland says that "Jesus is indicating that the purpose of the Christian life is a life of loving union with God at the depths of our being."¹⁰ He also believes that such union is necessary for inner transformation: "The Christian life in its fullness is far more than being active in a Christian community, affirming a certain set of beliefs or adopting a particular behavior pattern. These are a *secondary result* of the *primary reality* [emphasis added] of a life engaged in an ever deepening union with God in love."¹¹ The desire of every Christian to be made into the image of Christ is fulfilled through a loving union with God. "The life hidden with Christ in God is one of such growing union with God in love that God's presence becomes the context of our daily life....God's living presence becomes the ground of our identity, the source of our meaning, the seat of our value and the center of our purpose."¹²

⁹ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 34.

¹⁰ Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 14.

¹¹ Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 15.

¹² Mulholland, *The Deeper Journey*, 139.

Relationship at the Center of Spiritual Growth

Eugene Peterson emphasizes that God is at work and speaking in the lives of his people and in the world and that people were made for relationship with him.¹³ The implications of this truth are broad and have to do with the fact that believers must live out the Christian life in every facet of their existence. They were made for God's presence to live in them and through them. Faith and discipleship must not be confined to the cerebral world in which many have kept it; one cannot disconnect Christian spirituality from the context of life. Nor can growth take place except in relationship – with the Body of Christ and with the triune God. God uses people's relationship with him, the world, and others to form them into his image. This assertion of Peterson is a key to understanding why *lectio divina* has such potential to contribute to spiritual formation in the lives of believers. God works and speaks in the context of people's lives. He also speaks to them as they enter the world of Scripture in the context and language of the stories of the writer, their subjects, and their readers. God speaking in Scripture brings people's lives into perspective. If one agrees with Peterson, then it would follow that all spiritual disciplines and all spiritual formation activities must have relationship with God at their center and that if people lose sight of this, then the disciplines can become dead works.

Peterson makes an important contribution to the discussion on Scripture, prayer and relationship in pointing out the sanctity of language, its intensely personal nature and how it is a gift from God. He says, "Language is primarily a means of revelation, both for

¹³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005), 31-34; 45-46.

God and for us. Using words, God reveals himself to us. Using words, we reveal ourselves to God and to one another.”¹⁴ The implications of this simple truth are profound. It is important to believers to know that God values their words and wants to hear from them. This gives dignity to their prayers and allows them to have confidence to come to him. God created language and it is the means to communicate with him. In *lectio divina*, one reads and savors God’s Word, meditates and reflects on that Word, speaks to him about that Word and listens to what he says. Finally, one sits in the very presence of him who is the Word.

Simon Chan rightly emphasizes the relational nature of life with God and the natural response of the human heart to entering into that life: worship. His discussion of theology reflects this assumption: “True theology arises from personal experience of God in Jesus Christ, and reflecting on that experience leads to a deeper experiential knowledge of God. True theology is always doxological.”¹⁵ This parallels Gordon Fee’s belief that all exegesis should lead to worship and that, even though thorough study is crucial, it must not lose sight of the spiritual goal: “to hear the text in such a way that it leads the reader/hearer into the worship of God and into conformity to God and his ways.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: a Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 10.

¹⁵ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 17.

¹⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 11.

Primacy of Prayer in Spiritual Growth

Prayer has a primary place in the life of a Christian who wishes to grow spiritually. I think it is essential to hear Chan: "If indeed prayer is human readiness to hear, to follow, to comply so that the utterly basic relationship with God can be more fully realized, it explains why prayer is regarded as the heart of religion, the very sword of the saints and the mother and source of the ascent of the soul to God. In prayer we begin to see ourselves as God sees us and we see God as he is."¹⁷

Prayer must be seen in terms of relationship rather than as a means to obtaining an end. Philip Yancey says, "Though my own needs may drive me to prayer, there I come face-to-face with my greatest need: an encounter with God's own self."¹⁸ If believers do not enter into this relationship of encounter, then their prayer lives will become boring and lifeless. I believe that the lack of a growing relationship with God is one of the greatest reasons that most people are unable to sustain an enjoyable and fulfilling prayer life. Yancey agrees: "Prayer that is based on relationship and not transaction may be the most freedom-enhancing way of connecting to a God whose vantage point we can never achieve and can hardly imagine."¹⁹ This shift in understanding prayer can bring an end to the boring prayer lives of many spiritually stalled Christians. "Life can never be boring

¹⁷ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 129.

¹⁸ Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 55.

¹⁹ Yancy, *Prayer*, 55.

for the contemplative Christian. The sense of awe, wonder and thanksgiving will forever fill the worshiper with delight and gratitude,”²⁰ says James Houston.

Richard Foster also uses the language of relationship when describing prayer: “To be effective pray-ers, we must be effective lovers.”²¹ Houston, Yancey and Foster all agree that prayer is more about growing in relationship with God than it is about methods and techniques. I think that Houston and Foster are similar in their insistence that God’s overwhelming love for us is the basis for a relationship and the language of that relationship is prayer. Peterson’s emphasis on prayer being “personal language used between persons”²² is particularly helpful in a discussion about intimacy of relationship with God. Intimacy by its very definition must be personal. The language of intimate prayer must not be abstract and distant. “Jesus is not ‘a truth’ abstracted from the immediate and particular personal....Prayer is not a distancing operation.”²³

Gary Thomas begins to touch on a crucial truth regarding prayer when he describes the emptiness that many Christians are currently experiencing in their spiritual lives. There no one-size-fits-all spiritual model that will satisfy every Christian and lead to spiritual maturity. The church, as a whole, has tried to impose steps and strategies for growth by assuming that every dry Christian will respond equally well to the same kind of spiritual recipe. “Over and over again we give Christians the same spiritual

²⁰ James M. Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship with God*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 194.

²¹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 3.

²² Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell it Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 221.

²³ Peterson, *Tell it Slant*, 221.

prescription: ‘You want to grow as a Christian? All you have to do is develop a thirty- or sixty-minute quiet time and come to church every Sunday morning.’”²⁴

Throughout his book, *Sacred Pathways*, Thomas advocates different ways of loving God and expressing that love. All of these ways, however, are based on the fact that God is a person and that Christians’ spiritual lives are not a formula but a relationship. By viewing prayer in relational terms one can look for common factors that apply to every Christian’s relationship with God and relate them to prayer. A common denominator among all of Thomas’ spiritual pathways is cultivating *relationship* with God by spending time with Him.

Prayer is central to the life of all believers and any ministry or service must flow out of the inner transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. If the ultimate goal of the Christian life is, as Foster asserts, “an ever deeper formation of the inner personality so as to reflect the glory and goodness of God,”²⁵ then it is true that one must enter the process that leads to this transformation. It follows that prayer is not merely important; it is foundational and crucial to spiritual formation.

Learning from Christian Tradition

When it comes to prayer, I believe that those who were raised in evangelicalism would do well to incorporate into their lives the strengths of other Christian traditions because a particular group typically emphasizes one strength to the detriment of the others. For example, evangelicals do not normally highlight a life of prayer and intimacy

²⁴ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 14.

²⁵ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 85.

or the sacramental life. They would benefit greatly from the wealth of church history if they would include the strengths, especially, from what Foster classifies as the incarnational and contemplative streams.²⁶ Both of these traditions include vocabulary that is unfamiliar or even lost to the majority of evangelicals. At best, terms like contemplation, intimacy, solitude and meditation are viewed with suspicion. Foster explains the concepts in terms that are acceptable to most. He equates the “Contemplative Tradition” with the prayer-filled life and says that it “forms the foundation for holy living.”²⁷ We can enter the process of transformation by placing prayer at the center of our lives and practicing the contemplative tradition. I believe that all Christians can integrate the essential characteristics of the contemplative stream into their life of discipleship. I agree with Foster’s assertion that, “Entering into God’s great love for us and our responding in love toward God is the abiding gift of the Contemplative Tradition.”²⁸

Chan also places particular emphasis on the importance and validity of looking to Christian tradition for wisdom and practice. This applies especially to *lectio divina* and other spiritual disciplines. I believe that reticence to consult tradition is one of the great weaknesses of evangelical Protestantism. Christians today have been missing out by not tapping into the wealth of church history and tradition. I think Chan is correct when he says:

²⁶ Richard Foster, in his book, *Streams of Living Water*, identifies six traditions or “streams” in the Christian faith: Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical and Incarnational.

²⁷ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 61.

²⁸ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 33.

An openness to the Christian past is one important sign of a genuine Christian spirituality. Many modern Christians who have undertaken a serious pursuit of the spiritual life have found a deep affinity with the spiritual writers of the past that transcends time. This is because at the heart of spiritual theology is prayer, and it is in prayer that past and present are linked.²⁹

The Spirit in Spiritual Growth

Gordon Fee makes a foundational point (drawn from his knowledge of Pauline theology) that needs to be considered throughout any discussion on spiritual formation or growth. His point is this: the Holy Spirit is the key to everything! He says that, “for Paul ‘spirituality’ is nothing more nor less than life in the Spirit.”³⁰ Fee also says that it is clear that “the Spirit is the key element...of all Christian life and experience.”³¹ The distinguishing mark of Christians is that they “have the Spirit and are by that very fact, ‘spiritual.’”³² Therefore if they are spiritual people then *spiritual* formation has to, by definition, be carried out by the power and transforming work of the Spirit of the living God. This allows no room for the claim that *spiritual* formation is something people make happen by their own efforts. It is crucial that this point is made explicit from the outset because of the widespread misunderstanding and distortion of what is meant by spiritual formation.³³

²⁹ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 30.

³⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 37.

³¹ Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 37.

³² Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 37.

³³ For example, see the articles by Kate Treick and Michael Horton in *Modern Reformation* March/April 2009 and websites such as www.LighthouseTrailsResearch.com, www.apprising.org (Apprising Ministries), and www.cicministry.org (Critical Issues Commentary). I had one person refuse to participate in my research project due to discomfort with the supposed “mystical overtones” in *lectio divina*. This person also associated the project with Richard Foster and the “mystical practices” he teaches.

While the Holy Spirit is responsible for the transformation and growth of a Christian, the individual does have a role to play. Spiritual disciplines, rules of life and intentional discipleship activities are ways of opening up one's life and heart to allow the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit to come in and effect change. Chan, a Protestant himself, states that Protestants typically assume "that the Christian who has a grasp of the truth will somehow be able to carry it out in practice. Thus most sermons exhort their hearers to practice truth but do not explain how to do it."³⁴ This is where what Chan identifies as "ascetical theology"³⁵ comes into play by suggesting concrete steps toward progress in a specific area of spiritual formation. "The task for ascetical theology, therefore, is to provide an efficient rule of life and a good rationale for it so that we are motivated to live by rule. A rule of life could be simply defined as a 'schedule of the occupations and practices of piety an individual should perform during the day.'"³⁶ I think that in order for many evangelicals to accept this statement they must be able to look past the vocabulary. Evangelicals tend to associate many of the words that Chan uses with what they perceive as Roman Catholicism, legalism, or salvation by works, and they dismiss them outright. It is crucial for the whole church that Christians move beyond semantic debate and be open to the possibility that all are striving toward the same goal: lives that are being transformed and made into the image of Christ.

In *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard's initial description of Christian spirituality and formation is similar to Fee's in his assertion that growth takes place by

³⁴ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 130.

³⁵ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 130.

³⁶ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 137.

means of the indwelling Holy Spirit. He states that spiritual formation is a work of grace, affected by God himself: "The spiritual renovation and the 'spirituality' that comes from Jesus is nothing less than an invasion of natural human reality by a supernatural life 'from above'""³⁷ He also says that Christians all grow spiritually by "nourishing ourselves constantly on his personal presence."³⁸ Later Willard describes this work of grace as aided by our own human efforts and by employing the means through which transformation takes place. He does make it clear that the means include transforming encounters with God and that change takes place by knowing and experiencing him. He says that in Jesus' definition of eternal life, "he (Jesus) is speaking of the grace of constant, close interaction with the Trinitarian being of God that Jesus brings into the lives of those who seek and find him."³⁹

While I agree with Willard that vision, intention, and means must be present in the life of an apprentice of Jesus, I do not think that transformation or "renovation of the heart," as Willard calls it, is something that disciples of Jesus can bring about on their own simply by their own deliberate actions. Willard states, "*I must find the means* [emphasis added] of changing my inner being until it is substantially like his"⁴⁰ and lists various "means": study, meditation, self-sacrificial actions, meditating on the lives of the saints, etc. Yes, the "means" are available and yes, one must have the intention to seek spiritual formation, but they must give place to the work of the Holy Spirit and allow for

³⁷ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart :Putting on the Character of Christ*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 19.

³⁸ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 18.

³⁹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 51.

⁴⁰ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 90.

the fact that the means are but a way of posturing one's heart before the One who does the transforming. To leave this implicit leaves an opening for those who would say that spiritual formation is a form of works righteousness.

Spiritual Disciplines and Means of Grace

At first glance, a possible point of disagreement that one could have with Foster in *Life with God* is his statement about spiritual formation and obedience: "Here it is absolutely clear what spiritual formation is all about: disciples are to obey everything that I have commanded you. Obedience means *to bring our inner person into such a transformed condition* [emphasis added] that the deeds of Christ naturally arise out of it."⁴¹ Here Foster seems to be placing an emphasis on our ability to bring about our own transformation. He is putting obedience at the center of our relationship with God. I believe, however, that *love* is at the heart of the relationship and that out of *love* flows obedience. (Lovers make better workers.) We are incapable of "*bringing* our inner person into a transformed condition." This is the work that is done by God alone. Of course we cooperate in the process, but we cannot transform ourselves. Our part is to position our hearts before God. A later statement from Foster helps clarify his position and shows that he does *not* believe that we can effect transformation on our own: "The bottom-line goal of practicing the Spiritual Disciplines is so that when the moment of action comes, our automatic default-mode is to 'act naturally' according to the Spirit, not the flesh...."⁴²

⁴¹ Foster, *Life with God*, 96.

⁴² Foster, *Life with God*, 153.

We do not bring about our own inner transformation. That “transformed condition” is a fruit of the Spirit which comes from abiding in the Vine.

In reality, Foster sees spiritual disciplines as the means by which we *cooperate* with God. He says that the disciplines “in and of themselves have no merit whatsoever. Their purpose – their only purpose – is to place us before God.”⁴³ So the means by which we bring ourselves before God are the disciplines, and the outcomes are up to God: “the grace of God steps in and takes this simple offering of ourselves and creates out of it the kind of person who embodies the goodness of God.”⁴⁴ I think this is what the “means of grace” that Chan speaks of⁴⁵ is all about and that it should silence the opponents of spiritual formation who contend that the disciplines are a form of “works righteousness.” Foster says:

In the area of spiritual practice, it is a common mistake to assume that if we will only do “enough” spiritual practice, our efforts will result in a satisfying spiritual life....The truth is that spiritual practice, bathed in desire for God will take us more deeply into life with God. One of the distortions encasing it is that it is up to us to “get” a life with God. The testimony of the Scripture is that God has already gotten a life for us in Christ. We need only participate in the life already offered to us.⁴⁶

It is crucial for authors such as Foster and Willard to be very clear in their presentation of the spiritual disciplines. Some of their assumptions and practices can be misunderstood and distorted unless the theological framework for spiritual formation is clearly laid out and returned to with frequency. Foster does an excellent job of this

⁴³ Foster, *Life with God*, 17.

⁴⁴ Foster, *Life with God*, 17.

⁴⁵ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 24.

⁴⁶ Foster, *Life with God*, 140.

toward the end of *Life with God*. He states, “Spiritual formation does not occur by direct human effort, but through a relational process whereby we receive from God the power or ability to do what we cannot do by our own effort. We do not produce the outcome.”⁴⁷

It is important to note that Foster emphasizes that growth has to do with relationship; it has to do with Immanuel, “God with us.”⁴⁸ This point is clarified when he describes prayer as something we do to “engage in a relationship, not to count how many minutes we spend. We immerse ourselves in Scripture to engage with the living Word, not to measure our biblical knowledge. We do not produce change by practicing the Disciplines – we receive it. Spiritual growth is a gift, not an accomplishment.”⁴⁹

This assertion flies in the face of the critics who speak against “spiritual formation.” The importance of a work like McGrath’s *Christian Spirituality* cannot be overstated. It is essential to have a well-defined and orthodox definition for Christian spirituality. This will help to avoid the pitfalls and address the concerns of those who see the potential erroneous implications of incorrect spiritual theology. According to McGrath, most of these concerns did not exist prior to the 18th century because there was no division between spirituality and theology.⁵⁰ Now that we have separated them so distinctly, I believe it has opened the door for the mistrust and misunderstanding that exists today. McGrath’s explanation of human nature and destiny⁵¹ is significant in

⁴⁷ Foster, *Life with God*, 156.

⁴⁸ Foster, *Life with God*, viii.

⁴⁹ Foster, *Life with God*, 156.

⁵⁰ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 26-27.

⁵¹ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 41-46.

forming a correct understanding of the “means of grace” and the nature of the spiritual disciplines. If one believes, as Pelagius did, that human beings are capable of achieving spiritual growth without the help of God, then the spiritual disciplines are indeed a way in which to achieve our own sanctification, and we are responsible entirely for our own growth. If however, one believes that human nature is fallen and we are incapable of spiritual growth without the help of God, then the spiritual disciplines are a means by which we cooperate with the grace of God.

I appreciate McGrath’s summary of Geiler’s position that human beings can remove obstacles to God’s grace so that they may grow spiritually: “...believers cannot cause God’s grace; they can nevertheless dispose themselves in such a way as to make the most of it, in terms of spiritual growth and personal development. Believers must therefore expect to actively contribute towards their sanctification and renewal, while recognizing that their ultimate source and cause lies in God.”⁵² Similarly, speaking about prayer, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states,

God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God’s initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response. As God gradually reveals himself and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation.⁵³

I am concerned with the negative response of some in the Reformed tradition to the concept of spiritual formation. There seems to be a radical misunderstanding, a belief

⁵² McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 46.

⁵³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 675.

that spiritual formation promotes individualism and “sanctified selfishness”⁵⁴ I think that the representation of the Willow Creek “Reveal” study as a way to promote “the cultivation of self-feeders” via spiritual disciplines of American Christianity”⁵⁵ is unfortunate. From what I have read, none of the authors at the forefront of the spiritual formation “movement” would promote individualistic faith or separation from the authority and community of the church. It is important to note that Foster, as well as Chan and the other authors cited, all advocate discipleship and spiritual formation in the context of life in the Body of Christ. “We are all in this together.”⁵⁶ “Life with God is, by definition, life in community.”⁵⁷ I think that the church could accurately be called a “community of prayer.”

Spiritual formation, according to Foster, is transformation into the image of Christ. He believes that there can be no heart transformation without encountering God, because such transformation comes only from a life that is beyond one’s own. In his description of the Holiness Tradition, Foster points out that one of the dangers of this movement is to think that people can, by their own efforts, become holy and, in effect, transform themselves by certain activities. Foster says, “So there are things for us to do, but what we do does not make us righteous. All that the actions of discipleship do is place us before God so that he can begin to build the righteousness of the kingdom within

⁵⁴ John Bombaro, “A Catechetical Imitation of Christ,” *Modern Reformation*, March/April 2009, 31.

⁵⁵ Bombaro, “A Catechetical Imitation of Christ,” 31.

⁵⁶ Foster, *Life with God*, 106.

⁵⁷ Foster, *Life with God*, 107.

us.”⁵⁸ He is clear that growth is a work of the Holy Spirit: “Of primary significance is our vital union with God, our ‘new creation’ in Christ, our immersion in the Holy Spirit. It is this union that purifies the heart.”⁵⁹

Intimacy, Prayer and Transformation

It is out of intimacy of relationship with God by the working of the Holy Spirit that Christians come to know the love of God and return that love. By this, they are empowered for obedience and service. Peterson says, “there is nothing to be learned of Father-Son-Spirit except by entering the communion, entering the company of the Trinity: praying and listening, being quiet and attentive, repenting and obeying, asking and waiting.”⁶⁰

Prayer can be viewed in terms of the transformation that occurs when one encounters God in prayer. When a person enters into the presence of the triune God, they enter into a transforming relationship (2 Cor 3:18). The key to transformation is intimacy, because it is in the context of intimacy with God that one is able to trust him and open oneself to his transforming work. Encountering the love of God in prayer is life-changing. As Foster states: “We emerge from such soul-shaking, love-invaded times forever changed.”⁶¹ Such a person knows that no matter what God calls them to do or how he wants them to change, they are loved and accepted. This kind of intimacy of

⁵⁸ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 93.

⁵⁹ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 86.

⁶⁰ Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, 304

⁶¹ Foster, *Prayer*, 71.

knowing God and being fully known by him gives them the assurance to live confidently in his love and to trust his leadership in their lives.

Prerequisites For Prayer

Humility and Openness

Several prerequisites or conditions for fruitful prayer are listed consistently by different authors. Pennington includes humility and openness as important dispositions for being able to be faithful to a regular practice of *lectio divina*. He says that humility is “the full acceptance of reality. And the reality is that we very much need and want the divine communication... We come to our listening hungry and thirsty, filled with longing and need.”⁶² Pennington states further that, “True *lectio* calls not only for our humility, our knowing that we have a lot to learn, but also for a spirit of repentance... an honest desire to... be changed by the Word of God.”⁶³ Casey also sees humility and openness as crucial in the outcome of time spent doing *lectio divina*: “This outcome depends not only on the grace of God but also on our willingness to be touched. It means opening ourselves to a level of vulnerability that may be impossible at other times and in other activities. We come to Scriptures aware that our souls are perishing through starvation and we allow ourselves to express our desire to be fed.”⁶⁴

Pennington also believes that contemplation (the goal of *lectio divina*) is a gift, never the outcome of a process. This prevents one from becoming prideful and attributing

⁶² M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 6-7

⁶³ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 17.

⁶⁴ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 30.

any experience in prayer to one's own abilities. While contemplation is the goal, it is not achievable by following certain steps or assuming that the individual can make it happen. It is the gift of God. The human part is cooperation, humility, repentance, and loving attention. Casey also believes that the Holy Spirit is fully active in any benefit gained from *lectio divina*. He says, "The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness...reminding us of the realities of which Scripture speaks and leading us to the fullness of truth. Our reading is not unaided. The Spirit is as active in the reading of the Bible as in its writing."⁶⁵ The fact that *lectio divina* is dependent on the Holy Spirit, and not on a process, helps support Casey's underlying assumption that spiritual disciplines are not part of a self-effort to achieve one's own sanctification. He says: "Lectio divina is an element in a lifelong process of turning toward God."⁶⁶

Listening

Another prerequisite for prayer is *listening*. Pennington says that God is always communicating; Jesus is the Word and "(w)e therefore are essentially a *listening*, a listening for that Word."⁶⁷ One listens "not only for those transcendent truths of faith that are beyond the grasp of reason, but also for the very experience of God."⁶⁸ Every word God speaks is precious and each person, in humility, should desire their own *listening* "to be constantly expanded."⁶⁹ Peterson would agree with the importance of listening: "The

⁶⁵ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 47.

⁶⁶ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 9.

⁶⁷ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 12.

⁶⁸ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 18.

⁶⁹ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 13.

intent in reading Scripture, among people of faith, is to extend the range of their listening to the God who reveals himself in word.”⁷⁰ It is important to note that the emphasis on listening in prayer is based on the Word of God. Pennington says that God speaks in creation but “among all these words, we are gifted with that most precious and direct communication of the inspired Word of God. We turn to it in particular to hear.”⁷¹

Longing, Desire and Relationship

It seems there is a common thread of desire that runs through the hearts of those who want to grow spiritually. It is a longing for a place of deep encounter with God. This desire for deepening intimacy with God is revealed in the spiritual journey of many Christians. The longing becomes most apparent in their prayer life because it is here that they experience (or do not experience) an intimate personal encounter with God. Casey says, “What are we doing in lectio divina? We are seeking God... We have not yet attained the goal of our ambition, and so our reading is fundamentally an expression of our desire for God... Authentic reading, therefore, has the character of dissatisfaction; we always want to go further and deeper.”⁷² The recent increased interest in spiritual direction is directly related to this longing. In general, Christians do not know how to go about growing beyond where the church has taken them. Spiritual direction can play a key role in helping Christians to move forward in their spiritual journey. This is because, as Benner says, spiritual direction is “organized around prayer and conversation directed

⁷⁰ Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 89.

⁷¹ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 29-30.

⁷² Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 8.

toward deepening intimacy with God.”⁷³ *Lectio divina* and spiritual direction share the common goal of attentiveness to God and inner transformation through encountering him in prayer.

Often Christians get things backwards, seeking to find God in activity or busyness. Today’s churches are filled with Christians who are very involved in programs but have little sense of the presence of God in their lives. Howard Baker says:

We have looked for Jesus in all the wrong places. Elijah did not find God in the whirlwind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in the “still, small voice.” Neither will we find Christ in the noisy or the spectacular until we can first see Him in the quiet and the ordinary – in the reality of our own lives. This reality is unknowingly missed as our lives become hurried and distracted....The Bread of Life invites us to take Him deeply into our souls. It is not enough to know all about the Bread or even to deliver the Bread to others. In John 6:26-40, Jesus says that life comes when we eat this living bread. Nothing short of this direct experience of the reality of Christ will satisfy the hunger of our souls.⁷⁴

Benner describes his own personal longing for more: “The extent of my spiritual impoverishment first became obvious in my mid-thirties. I began to feel dissatisfied with my limited direct experience of God’s presence. I was spiritually restless and filled with longing...I longed to know him personally and experientially, not just know about him.”⁷⁵ This kind of intense yearning for God is reflected in the words of St. John of the Cross, quoted by Baker: “I no longer want to hear about you, beloved Lord, through messengers. I no longer want to hear doctrines about you, nor to have my emotions stirred by people speaking of you. I yearn for your presence.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 17.

⁷⁴ Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 112.

⁷⁵ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 30-31.

⁷⁶ Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 111.

Yancey begins to approach what I believe to be the key to understanding prayer when he quotes Gerald C. May: "I am convinced that human beings have an inborn desire for God. This desire is our deepest longing and most precious treasure."⁷⁷ Yancey goes on to say that "if we are made in God's own image, God will find a way to fulfill that deepest longing. Prayer is that way."⁷⁸ Houston would agree:

Only when all our drives and desires, hope and loves are redirected toward God, do we become fully human. We were made for relationships, created to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The function of prayer is to bring these realizations to the surface of our lives. Prayer points us beyond ourselves, beyond our friendships, to the deepest realization of all: that God made us to be lovers of God. He is at the very heart of our hearts.⁷⁹

There is another sense in which one must look at desire and prayer. Houston says, "The absence of desire can kill prayer, because how can God give to us if we do not expect or want him to do so?"⁸⁰ Human beings have a natural longing and desire for God but may attempt to satisfy that longing in ways that do not bring fulfillment. On the other hand, Christians may quench and suppress their longings for God. Desire and expectation can be cultivated. People can ask God to increase their thirst for him. People can ask him to reveal other sources of satisfaction so that they will be aware and choose not to look to them for gratification. People can place themselves before God and allow him to meet the longings and desires of their hearts. Foster puts it this way: "At every opportunity we place our mind before God with inward confessions and petitions: 'Mercy, Lord,' 'I love

⁷⁷ Yancey, *Prayer*, 16.

⁷⁸ Yancey, *Prayer*, 16.

⁷⁹ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 285.

⁸⁰ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 49.

you, Jesus,’ ‘Show me your way today.’ Even more, we descend with the mind into the heart and live in quiet wonder and adoration and praise.”⁸¹

The amazing thing about desire for God is that it is never completely satisfied. He encounters his people and lets them taste and see that he is good, and then he allows them to thirst after him again. Desire actually grows stronger with each encounter. St. Bernard of Clairvaux expresses this in his hymn, “We taste thee, O thou living bread, and long to feast upon thee still; We drink of thee, the fountainhead and thirst our souls from thee to fill.”⁸² Desire is a key prerequisite to contemplation. Gary Thomas quotes Thomas Merton:

The fact remains that contemplation will not be given to those who willfully remain at a distance from God, who confine their interior life to a few routine exercises of piety and a few external acts of worship and service performed as a matter of duty...God does not manifest Himself to these souls because they do not seek Him with any real desire.⁸³

Exploring Lectio Divina

One of the reasons that I want to emphasize *lectio divina* and its four stages (reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation) is because it is an effective and holistic method of prayer. A Christian’s prayer life and spiritual growth must be grounded in Scripture. *Lectio divina* is scripture-based reflection and prayer that leads to encounter with God. Houston says:

Prayer needs help to work....The most important aid toward prayer is to begin to make one’s own explorations in the Bible....prayer goes hand in hand with discovering the riches of the Bible. As we saturate ourselves in the Bible’s

⁸¹ Foster, *Prayer*, 71,

⁸² Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 192.

⁸³ Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 180.

teachings and attitudes, we become ‘biblical people,’ focusing our lives upon the God revealed in the Bible.⁸⁴

Lectio divina keeps Christians biblical in their prayers and allows God to transform and direct their lives according to the truth of his Word. In other words, it keeps a person on track. Peterson is in agreement with this and says, “The Scriptures, read and prayed, are our primary and normative access to God as he reveals himself to us....Prayer detached from Scripture, from listening to God, disconnected from God’s words to us, short-circuits the relational language that is prayer.”⁸⁵ Two of Houston’s other suggestions about how to “help” prayer work are stillness and community.⁸⁶ Both of these are possible in *lectio divina*. When practiced alone, this kind of prayer includes solitude, quiet and listening. When *lectio divina* is practiced in community, all receive the encouragement of brothers and sisters who are on the same journey.

I believe that the four stages of *lectio divina* provide a comprehensive roadmap for those who desire to develop intimacy in relationship with God. Regardless of what one calls the different stages, they still represent a deepening encounter with God in prayer. Prayer need not always be defined according to reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation, but the underlying principles are vital in a growing relationship with God.

Towards a Working Definition of Lectio Divina

In order to fully understand what *lectio divina* is, it is necessary to understand what it is not. Most of the authors would agree that *lectio divina* is not reading Scripture

⁸⁴ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 37.

⁸⁵ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 104.

⁸⁶ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 38-39.

strictly in order to gain information. When a person simply reads for information, they are trying to exert their control over the text rather than letting the text shape and form them. *Lectio divina* is reading Scripture in a formational way. Muholland emphasizes the need for taking time with the text so that God can encounter the individual in it and form them through it. In formational reading, “the point is meeting God in the text.”⁸⁷ Bruce Demarest also weighs in on this subject: “Formative reading seeks to shape the reader spiritually by the inspired text of Scripture. According to this method, the reader places himself before the Word to hear what God has to say to respond obediently. He approaches the sacred text with a view to Christ directing his thoughts, enlarging his heart, and leading him to greater spiritual maturity.”⁸⁸ This kind of reading requires humility and vulnerability, both of which are a relinquishing of the need to control or analyze the text. Fryling agrees with this perspective, “The goal of lectio is not to gain larger quantities of information but to deeply experience the truth of a small amount of Scripture.”⁸⁹

Lectio divina, in some form, has existed almost since the early church. Enzo Bianchi describes its origins looking back to Guigo’s writing in the twelfth century:

Guigo’s work is neither the first nor the only one of its kind in the Middle Ages, but, with its four steps, it has the advantage of systematizing the subject with great clarity. The idea of uniting prayer with reading runs through the entire tradition from Origen to Jerome, and the triple formula, *lectio, meditatio, oratio* is the one mainly used in the Middle Ages, above all by the Cistercians. One point remains absolutely the same in all these gradations...these three or four attitudes are

⁸⁷ M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 55.

⁸⁸ Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 137.

⁸⁹ Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 67.

always steps in a single journey....Lectio unifies the different phases of its essential approach along the lines of its own deepest objective: union with God.⁹⁰

Bianchi's discussion of *lectio divina*, its origins and development are particularly helpful in understanding why there are so many differing versions of this ancient prayer practice. From the beginning there were various forms of *lectio divina* and there continue to be so today.

The Benedictine Rule, in its attempt to make religious life a school of the Lord's service, says that to meditate means to read and re-read the Word, to chew it over and murmur it, to ponder it and repeat it, to fix it in the mind and keep it in the heart. This is different from trying to arrive eventually at a discussion of it (*scholasticism*), or at a feeling (*devotio moderna*). Instead, *lectio divina* seeks to arrive at prayer (*oratio*) and at contemplation, and thereby at action (*opus Dei*).⁹¹

Bruce Demarest agrees that the tradition of *lectio divina* has been lost in modern times, and that Christians have emphasized the intellectual side of spiritual life over the affective.

For centuries, then, Christians practiced a full range of prayer that we have lost today. Mental prayer (via the mind), verbal prayer (through the lips), and contemplative prayer (from the heart) were once integrated through the practice of *lectio divina*. And so the whole of man's fallen, scattered being were brought into unity under God. In modern times the mental, verbal, and affective parts of prayer have separated from one another. Given our preference for intellectual activity and action, we've neglected prayer of the heart and contemplative prayer.⁹²

In defense of the church, Demarest notes a recent growing trend among Protestant

Christians to adopt the practice of *lectio divina* "to their spiritual profit."⁹³ He believes

⁹⁰ Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio divina*. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1998), 69.

⁹¹ Bianchi, *Praying the Word*, 17.

⁹² Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 167.

⁹³ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 136.

that *lectio divina* “represents a wholistic approach to biblical meditation.”⁹⁴ *Lectio divina* is not only holistic, it is also balanced. I believe that these two characteristics can answer the objections of those who think that it tends toward eastern mysticism, is emotionally oriented or can lead to theological error. *Lectio divina* is balanced because the Scriptures are at the core of what happens in meditation and contemplation. To engage the heart is not to leave behind the mind, but it is to involve that part of the human soul that is just as important as the intellect. Demarest says,

By balancing verbal prayer with contemplative prayer, God becomes more real to me, and my love for Him more consuming. In verbal prayer, I tell God that He is loved, but through contemplative prayer, God tells me that I am loved with a love that is undying. The purpose of contemplation is not primarily to form ideas about God. No, it's to enter into God's presence and be touched by the One who lives at the center of our being. Practicing the presence deepens experiential knowledge of God. It enlarges love at a more profound and renewing level than mental reflection alone.”⁹⁵

Demarest quotes A.W. Tozer in attempting to show how *lectio divina* can help bring about the ultimate goal of the intellectual disciplines of the Christian life.

Verbal prayer, Bible study and Christian service “are all good and should be engaged in by every Christian. But at the bottom of all these things, giving meaning to them will be the inward habit of beholding God....When the habit of inwardly gazing Godward becomes fixed within us, we shall be ushered onto a new level of spiritual life more in keeping with the promises of God and the mood of the New Testament.”⁹⁶

This is the goal of *lectio divina*—contemplation of God, practicing his presence, encountering him and letting him transform Christians into the image of his Son.

⁹⁴ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 136.

⁹⁵ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 169.

⁹⁶ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 169.

Lectio Divina and Spiritual Growth

Lectio divina is ideally suited for use today in various settings. Some Protestant authors are now recognizing the value of this traditional way of praying and are bringing it to the attention of the church. It is beginning to be recognized as a valuable tool for spiritual growth and I believe that, because of its basis in Scripture, it deserves serious consideration for wide use among Christians, especially among more mature believers who are feeling stalled in their spiritual growth. Further, *lectio divina* should be practiced because of its potential for increasing intimacy with God and personal transformation.

Enzo Bianchi's description of *lectio divina* emphasizes this point:

It is a great misfortune that today the term *lectio divina* and its meaning are unknown to a large segment of those in religious life. It is thought of as a prayer-form appropriate only to a strictly monastic setting—Benedictine and Cistercian....But *lectio divina* is not the privileged property of monks....*Lectio divina* is simply the practice of praying over Scripture in preference to any other spiritual or patristic text. It is explicitly conscious that the Word is central in the Christian life, that the Word is sovereign over every form of religious life, and that the Word has a role in effectively renewing religious life because it provides the norm for every kind of Christian prayer.⁹⁷

Benner also affirms the transformational nature of *lectio divina*. From its origins, it was intended as a means of spiritual growth:

This ancient prayer practice was developed expressly for transformational purposes. It was understood as a way of opening ourselves to God so we might be touched, awakened, realigned, integrated and healed....It leads us to a way of understanding and practicing prayer that is vastly different from how most of us understand and practice it, because it leads us to opening ourselves to God so God can pray in and through us.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Bianchi, *Praying the Word*, 17.

⁹⁸ David G. Benner, *Opening to God: Lectio divina and Life as Prayer*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 13.

Foster posits that *lectio divina* positions the heart so that Scripture can shape and form the life of a believer:

There is a place for reading large portions of the Bible in one sitting...but this is not it. Here we are concerned with depth rather than breadth....lectio is a way of allowing the mind to “descend” into the heart, so that both mind and heart might be drawn into the love and goodness of God. Our goal is immersion. We are shaped by the environment in which we live and breathe and interact. Lectio immerses us in the deep and timeless waters of God, that more of God’s light might flow into our time-bound lives.⁹⁹

Alice Fryling would agree that *lectio divina*, because of its foundation in Scripture, is a valuable practice for Christians who desire to grow. “People who are experienced in prayer often notice that their prayers are deeply rooted in Scripture. When they pray, they pray Scripture.”¹⁰⁰ *Lectio divina* has an important influence on our prayer. When we pray using Scripture, sometimes it becomes hard to determine where Scripture stops and prayer begins. According to Fryling, “we do this when we read slowly, as in *lectio divina*. We do this when we stop our reading and muse on a truth we see in Scripture.”¹⁰¹ Willard shares the convictions of the other authors about the importance of the Word of God in shaping our growth: “To take the ‘information’ of the Scripture into a mind thinking straight under the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit is to place our feet solidly on the high road of spiritual formation under God.”¹⁰²

Howard Baker, in his book *Soul Keeping*, suggests that there are six paths of spiritual growth that help lead people into life-transforming encounters with God:

⁹⁹ Richard Foster, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 62

¹⁰⁰ Fryling, *Seeking God Together*, 87.

¹⁰¹ Fryling, *Seeking God Together*, 88.

¹⁰² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 106.

1.) Grace, 2.) humility, 3.) wholehearted prayer, 4.) meditative prayer, 5.) silence and solitude, and 6.) spiritual direction.¹⁰³ Baker's use of the term meditative prayer encompasses much more than just meditation on Scripture. It is actually a form of *lectio divina* and has to do with encountering Christ in prayer through the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life.¹⁰⁴ He suggests that as a person hears the Word of God spoken directly to them as an individual that it becomes spirit and life to that person.¹⁰⁵

Chan points out that since Protestants like to call themselves the "people of the Word," the exercise of spiritual reading is probably an excellent starting point for them as far as the spiritual disciplines are concerned.¹⁰⁶ While true, I wonder if this is always easy for evangelicals, since many have been trained in Bible study methods, and it is very difficult for them to move beyond methodologies such as observation, interpretation and application. Chan's definition of spiritual reading as "superslow"¹⁰⁷ reading is helpful although somewhat different than that of *lectio divina*. I think he is attempting to describe it in a simple way so that it can easily be taken as a first step toward growth. This kind of discipline is something many evangelicals are not used to, and it does not readily fit into a read-the-Bible-in-a-year plan. Chan believes that Christians should allow the Word of God to penetrate their hearts: "If our aim is to go beyond acquiring facts to letting the

¹⁰³ Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 37-41.

¹⁰⁴ Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 39-40.

¹⁰⁵ Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 159.

¹⁰⁷ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 163.

truth speak to us, then we need to read slowly, savoring every word, mulling over it and digesting it, so that it begins to affect the heart deeply.”¹⁰⁸

Other authors would agree with Chan that a great hindrance to spiritual reading is our orientation toward reading for information. Foster says that “reading the Bible for interior transformation is a far different endeavor than reading the Bible for historical knowledge, literary appreciation, or religious instruction. In the latter case we learn head knowledge; in the former, heart knowledge.”¹⁰⁹ I think that Christians will move forward in learning how to let the Word transform their hearts if they lay down scholarly pride, impatience, and demands for immediate results. Believers would do well to give themselves a chance to develop new habits and new expectations of the Word. I agree with Foster that “we must bring to the Bible our whole selves, expectantly, attentively and humbly.”¹¹⁰ Chan suggests that we begin by diligent reading of the Word, out of which spiritual reading can grow and, in turn, a “meditative habit of mind.”¹¹¹ He goes on to show how the ultimate goal of spiritual growth can be a result of practicing this discipline. “Progress in meditation is evident when discursive thought (usually accompanied by vocal prayers, colloquies, soliloquies and so on) are gradually replaced by ‘wordless’ prayer, rapt attention, awe and silence before God. The end is Christian perfection or union with God, the realization of ‘man’s chief end.’”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 163.

¹⁰⁹ Foster, *Life with God*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Foster, *Life with God*, 22.

¹¹¹ Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 171.

¹¹² Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 171.

Balance of Mind and Heart

Emphasis on reading with the mind and the heart is a common element among the authors surveyed. Foster says that we must not come to the Bible with the mind and not the heart, because that separates the written word from the living Word. Likewise, we must also not approach the Bible with the eyes of our heart only and leave out the mind, because it will lead to misunderstanding. He advocates *lectio divina* and says that it “is a way of recovering our ability to be attentive to the heart of God in the Word of God.”¹¹³ Casey says sacred reading begins with reading, using the intellect, informed by a correct understanding of the meaning of the text. Pennington would agree that careful study is essential and that we must love the Lord with all our minds. “We must ever press our edges, ever seek to use our minds to their fullest. Feeding the mind and developing our intellectual understanding of God’s word is crucial to our spiritual development.”¹¹⁴

Peterson claims that those who are inclined toward the “spiritual” feel that careful exegesis is an “enormous inconvenience.”¹¹⁵ He goes further to say that “It is almost impossible...not to feel that our attraction to the spiritual confers a slight edge of privilege to us, exempting us from the bother of exegesis. We sense that we are insiders to the ways of God; we get intuitions that confirm our ideas and insights.”¹¹⁶ I believe that this is why Peterson is reluctant to apply the traditional meaning of the contemplative stage of *lectio divina*. If he were to examine what Casey and Pennington believe about

¹¹³ Foster, *Life with God*, 73.

¹¹⁴ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 24.

¹¹⁵ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 52.

¹¹⁶ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 52.

the primacy of the Word of God in prayer, I think Peterson then would be able to authenticate or acknowledge the true goal of *lectio divina*. For example, Casey's emphasis on the fundamental necessity of "searching out the authentic meaning of the text"¹¹⁷ should put to rest the hesitancy of Peterson to fully explore the stage of contemplation. It is not only Peterson who points out the dangers inherent in *lectio divina*; Pennington¹¹⁸ and Casey¹¹⁹ likewise warn of the pitfalls of this kind of prayer if it is done without grounding in the Word of God.

I find Casey's explanation of *lectio divina* to be very helpful, especially his insistence on balance between the heart and the mind and his clear presentation of the role and purpose of sacred reading. "When our minds and hearts are formed according to Christ, then our actions can be vehicles of grace to others. The precondition is, however, that our consciousness is shaped to agree with that of Christ. And this is precisely the role of *lectio divina*. It is a school in which we learn Christ."¹²⁰ In this way, Casey helps dispel the notion that contemplation is self-absorbed and not concerned with holy living. Likewise, this explains *lectio divina* so that one can readily understand the heart motivation and purpose of engaging in sacred reading: transforming the heart and being made into the image of Christ.

Pennington emphasizes the need for *lectio divina* by quoting from Pope John Paul II: "There are too many faithful who remain deprived of a vital encounter with sacred

¹¹⁷ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 63.

¹¹⁸ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 60.

¹¹⁹ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 63.

¹²⁰ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 39.

Scriptures and who fail to nourish their faith with the richness of the Word of God.”¹²¹

Pope Benedict XVI is also a strong proponent of *lectio divina*.

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of “*lectio divina*”: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (Dei Verbum, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual spring-time.

As a strong point of biblical ministry, *Lectio divina* should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times. It should never be forgotten that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (cf. Ps 119[118]:105).¹²²

One thing that makes *lectio divina* so attractive is that, as Casey describes it, it is not so much a method as it is prayer. “Fundamentally it is the atmosphere of prayer that penetrates every aspect of holy reading that makes it distinctive...Prayer is not suddenly born at the third stage. Rather, prayer accompanies us as we open the book and settle our mind, as we read the page and ponder its meaning. Prayer is the meaning of *lectio divina*.”¹²³

¹²¹ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 30.

¹²² Benedict XVI, *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the International Congress Organized to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation “Die Verbum.”* Castel Gandolfo, Friday, 16 September 2005. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050916_40-dei-verbum_en.html (accessed September 17, 2011).

¹²³ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 61.

Various Views of the Four Stages¹²⁴

Jeannette Bakke's description of the four core movements of *lectio divina* provides a basic framework for our discussion as we look at other authors and see how they compare. She says:

Lectio divina contains four parts: *Lectio*, reading; *meditatio*, meditation; *oratio*, prayer; and *contemplatio*, contemplation. *Lectio* means reading Scripture with the desire to be addressed by God. During this step, we invite the Spirit of God to show us whatever we need to see. During *meditatio*, we go deeper. We may visualize a scriptural scene or explore a word or a phrase. This step may include intellectual questioning, pondering, or study. It is a time for integration. During *oratio*, the third stage, we pray, responding to what we have been reading and reflecting on. The prayer may be short or a back and forth conversation with God. If the prayer opens us to new ideas, we may want to read or reflect further. *Contemplatio*, the fourth part of *lectio divina*, involves resting in loving silence with God.¹²⁵

Pennington's concise description is helpful in the examination of how various authors adapt and explain their version of *lectio divina*: "As we listen to the Word (*lectio*), a word, a phrase, a sentence may well strike us, and we let it reverberate within, opening and expanding, forming and shaping (*meditatio*), calling forth varied responses (*oratio*) until finally we simply rest in the Reality to which it all leads (*contemplatio*)."¹²⁶

The four parts to *lectio*, according to Foster, are listening, reflecting, praying and obeying.¹²⁷ Foster's "listening" step corresponds to Casey's "*lectio*."¹²⁸ His stage of "reflecting" has elements of classic "*meditatio*" as well as some aspects of

¹²⁴ See Figure 3:1 on p 121 at the end of this section for a comparison chart of various authors' summaries of the four stages of *lectio divina*.

¹²⁵ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 200-201.

¹²⁶ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 66.

¹²⁷ Foster, *Life with God*, 63.

¹²⁸ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 57.

“*contemplatio*.” Foster says that in reflection, “we are floating on the depths of God, held safely in the waters of his loving presence. This is the deep connection we long for but rarely receive in a Christianized subculture where, too often, talking about experiencing God substitutes for actual experience of God.”¹²⁹ Foster’s next step of “praying” is a mixture of both *oratio* and *contemplatio*: “Now is the time to rest simply and deeply on the currents of prayer, allowing the Spirit to carry our spirit back to the One in whom we live and move and have our being.”¹³⁰ His final step of “obeying”¹³¹ closely corresponds to Peterson’s fourth step of “living what we read.”¹³² Foster also calls this “application”¹³³ or “contemplating what we will carry forward into our lives.”¹³⁴ This is completely different from contemplation as described by Casey¹³⁵ and Pennington.¹³⁶ It actually corresponds best with “*actio*” or action which some have added to make a fifth stage to *lectio divina*. Pope Benedict XVI says, “We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.”¹³⁷

¹²⁹ Foster, *Life with God*, 67.

¹³⁰ Foster, *Life with God*, 68.

¹³¹ Foster, *Life with God*, 69.

¹³² Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 113, c.f. 109, 112.

¹³³ Foster, *Life with God*, 69.

¹³⁴ Foster, *Life with God*, 63.

¹³⁵ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 57-59?.

¹³⁶ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 64-66.

¹³⁷ Pope Benedict XVI. *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini*. (Rome, Italy, September 30 2010.), 296. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html#The_Liturgy,_Privileged_Setting_For_The_Word_Of_God (accessed September 1, 2011).

Peterson avoids the terminology of the Contemplative Tradition in his description of *lectio divina* in *Eat this Book* by equating contemplation with living out what one has gained in the first three steps of reading, meditating and prayer.¹³⁸ In another place, however, while promoting the necessity of prayer, Peterson makes a case for his version of *meditatio* and *oratio*: “There is a large, leisurely center to existence where God must be deeply pondered, lovingly believed. It means entering realms of spirit where wonder and adoration have space to develop, where play and delight have time to flourish.”¹³⁹ This is about as close as he gets to the ancient or traditional understanding of contemplation.

Baker’s six-part description of what he calls “gospel meditation”¹⁴⁰ is actually very similar to the first three stages of *lectio divina*. His definition of the sixth stage combines what Bakke,¹⁴¹ following the classical description of *lectio divina*, would divide into two distinct stages of *oratio* and *contemplatio*. I have parenthetically inserted the corresponding stages of *lectio divina* into Baker’s six steps:

1. Quiet yourself internally and externally.
2. Slowly read a passage from one of the gospels. (Reading)
3. Engage the “application of the senses.” (Meditation)
4. Enter into the role of one of the characters in the passage. (Meditation)
5. Listen prayerfully for Jesus’ words spoken directly to you. Feel his touch.
Notice his actions. (Meditation)

¹³⁸ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 113.

¹³⁹ Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 65.

¹⁴⁰ Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 110.

¹⁴¹ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 200.

6. Respond honestly to Jesus with thanks, praise, questions, or simply in quiet listening or loving adoration. (Prayer and Contemplation)¹⁴²

Fryling describes *lectio divina* as having six steps: silence, reading, thinking, dialogue with God, waiting quietly, and determining what to do in response.¹⁴³ These correspond to the expanded six steps of *lectio* sometimes found in other writings: silence, reading, meditating, prayer, contemplation and action. The authors who would not include an “action” step would probably say that, while action is important, it is not a stage of *lectio divina*. Instead, they would look upon it as the natural outcome of a life transformed by relationship with God (eg. Michael Casey).¹⁴⁴

Jeannette Bakke says “*Lectio divina*...provides a particular pattern for people to follow and begins with Scripture as a way to listen to God.”¹⁴⁵ Bakke’s description of the changes that take place in an individual’s desires regarding prayer show how God may draw them toward *lectio divina* as a way of praying using the Scriptures as a launching point. This is because growth in prayer involves moving more and more toward prayer that is initiated by God. In *lectio divina*, prayer moves toward meditation, listening to God and contemplation.

Guigo provides an excellent description of the stages of *lectio divina* and how one step flows into the next. His language is different than the other authors but is similar in content:

¹⁴² Baker, *Soul Keeping*, 118.

¹⁴³ Fryling, *Seeking God Together*, 67.

¹⁴⁴ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 200.

Reading comes first, and is, as it were, the foundation; it provides the subject matter we must use for meditation. Meditation considers more carefully what is to be sought after; it digs, as it were, for treasure which it finds and reveals, but since it is not in meditation's power to seize upon the treasure, it directs us to prayer. Prayer lifts itself up to God with all its strength, and begs for the treasure it longs for, which is the sweetness of contemplation. Contemplation when it comes rewards the labors of the other three; it inebriates the thirsting soul with the dew of heavenly sweetness. Reading is an exercise of the outward senses; meditation is concerned with the inward understanding; prayer is concerned with desire; contemplation outstrips every faculty.¹⁴⁶

Guigo describes how each stage is dependent on the others. This is particularly important because *lectio divina* must not be seen as a set of steps to be accomplished but more of a movement of the heart:

Reading without meditation is sterile, meditation without reading is liable to error, prayer without meditation is lukewarm, meditation without prayer is unfruitful, prayer when it is fervent wins contemplation, but to obtain it without prayer would be rare, even miraculous....For what is the use of spending one's time in continuous reading, turning the pages...unless we can extract nourishment from them by chewing and digesting this food so that its strength can pass into our innermost heart? Again, what use is it to anyone if he sees in his meditation what is to be done, unless the help of prayer and the grace of God enable him to achieve it? ...If meditation is to be fruitful, it must be followed by devoted prayer, and the sweetness of contemplation may be called the effect of prayer.¹⁴⁷

Reading

The stage of reading in *lectio divina* is the simplest to describe. Demarest speaks for the other authors in his emphasis on heart attitude, slowing down and listening attentively. He suggests selecting a Scripture passage such as a psalm, or biblical prayer, or parable or one of Jesus' teachings. Then, "take the attitude that God has given this Scripture for your spiritual nourishment. With a listening heart, read aloud the biblical

¹⁴⁶ Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks: a Letter On the Contemplative Life and Twelve Meditations*. Translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 79-80.

¹⁴⁷ Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks*, 82.

text slowly and deliberately. When you alight upon a word, a phrase, or a sentence that speaks to your heart, pause in your reading.”¹⁴⁸

Meditation

Houston, in one of the most helpful discussions I have encountered, defines meditation, explaining its history and the motivation behind using it as a springboard to prayer and contemplation. He ties Bible reading, meditation and prayer (the first three stages of *lectio divina*) together and shows how each one fuels and informs the next. Meditation, the second stage, is “reflect(ing) with our minds on the Bible and the truths of God, in order to love God more personally and to live as he wants us to. Meditation is a form of conversation with God, or before God, that is mental rather than verbalized.”¹⁴⁹ According to Houston, verbal prayer can be seen as a “test of endurance” but meditation has “always been a spontaneous delight and joy in wonder at the mysteries of Scripture.”¹⁵⁰ He points out that meditation that is not led by Scripture can be dangerous and Scripture reading without meditation is “barren.”¹⁵¹ Meditation must be approached with great humility, awareness of sin and acknowledgement of the need for God’s forgiveness.

A look at the medieval monastic tradition also helps clarify what Christian meditation should look like. In the end, meditation on Scripture results in a love and

¹⁴⁸ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 136.

¹⁴⁹ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 257.

¹⁵⁰ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 258.

¹⁵¹ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 259.

respect for the Word of God and it prepares the believer's heart and mind for prayer.

Houston describes the monastic tradition:

The monks were taught to see prayer and reading as inseparable and to give themselves to both activities. Between the two there was also meditation, which was seen as reflecting upon and memorizing Scripture after it had been read. The idea was to avoid the shallow type of reading that we are so used to doing. This called for admiration for what was being read; it prompted desire and aroused attention.¹⁵²

It is important to recognize, as Foster states, that meditation "differs even from the study of Scripture."¹⁵³ Foster compares meditation with a cow chewing its cud in order to fully assimilate that which it has already consumed. When one meditates on Scripture, it moves from the mind into the heart and one is able to receive its truths into one's life. Foster makes a similar case to Houston's for Biblically based meditation. "We must first have our minds filled with and disciplined by Scripture before we can, with genuine profit, enter into the presence of the Holy in unmediated communion."¹⁵⁴ So, for both authors, Scripture meditation is foundational for contemplation. This is why *lectio divina* is an excellent way to structure prayer. It moves from reading Scripture to meditating on it and responding to it, thereby positioning the heart before God to encounter him in contemplation.

Bianchi describes the most important aspect of meditation: "Authentic meditation...is always centered on God and Christ and never the self alone. Above all, authentic Christian meditation is not done with a view to 'getting something in return.' If something good happens, that's a bonus. Meditation seeks only one thing: to grow in

¹⁵² Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 258.

¹⁵³ Foster, *Prayer*, 146.

¹⁵⁴ Foster, *Prayer*, 145-146.

communion with God.”¹⁵⁵ Demarest would agree with Bianchi, but at first glance seems to put slightly more emphasis on the outcome than on relationship with God. He says, “meditate—or mull over—the word or words that captured your attention. Listen to, ponder, and savor the love message from God until it settles in your soul. Through reverent reflection, allow the sacred text to become your spiritual meat and drink. Permit it to nurture, challenge, or test something in you.”¹⁵⁶

It can be seen, however, that Demarest is coming from the same perspective as Bianchi. His primary interest in *lectio divina* is to bring the one praying into a personal encounter with God through his Word. He believes that God will bring personal growth and transformation through this encounter. The basis of this transformation is intimate relationship with God. Demarest says:

It’s helpful to read the Word with a view to relationship. Search for relational images that connect you with each of the members of the Godhead. Place yourself in the Scripture so that it speaks to your life. Permit the biblical words, which are “full of living power” (Heb 4:12), to probe our attitudes, emotions, and aspirations. Truths received in faith become sweetness to the soul; other truths resisted will be more bitter. In the meditative stillness, listen to the voice of God as He leads you on the path of spiritual growth. This meditation stage of *lectio* assumes that God’s revelation is personal as well as propositional. The Word imparts information but pausing to take time with it brings the reader face-to-face with the living Lord.¹⁵⁷

Benner experiences times of personal encounter with God through meditation on Scripture:

Non-meditative reading may involve some reflection, but it is usually more oriented toward analysis and comprehension of content. For years I read the Bible this way, attempting to discover or be reminded of things that would help me live

¹⁵⁵ Bianchi, *Praying the Word*, 17.

¹⁵⁶ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 136.

¹⁵⁷ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 136-137.

the Christian life. Meditative reading is less focused on the words and more focused on the Word behind the words.¹⁵⁸

He found an answer to his longing for more personal experience of God in *lectio divina*: “There is no substitute for meditation on Scripture as a route to a deep, personal engagement with God.”¹⁵⁹ “The listening to Scripture that is at the core of *lectio divina* is a listening in silence and stillness that seeks to encounter God as he speaks directly and personally to you.”¹⁶⁰ Pope Benedict XVI encourages Christians to practice *lectio divina* because it “...is truly capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God.”¹⁶¹

Demarest also concludes that meditation on Scripture is essential in the growth of the Christian life. He says that meditation “involves deep, repetitive reflection on eternal truth”¹⁶² and that “to meditate as a Christian is to cultivate the soil of the soul, which the traffic of the world compacts and hardens. It is the replanting of the Word’s seed, the uprooting of sin’s weeds, the nurturing of truth into fruitful activity.”¹⁶³ Leech would agree with Demarest’s definition of meditation. He writes, “Thomas Merton points out that in the monastic tradition, all meditation, all prayer and all reading are seen as

¹⁵⁸ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 110.

¹⁵⁹ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 113.

¹⁶⁰ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 169.

¹⁶¹ Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. 86. October 2008. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini_en.html (accessed September 16, 2011).

¹⁶² Demarest *Satisfy Your Soul* p 134.

¹⁶³ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 133.

involving the whole person and not simply the mind. Meditation is therefore an activity of reflection, a penetration of one's deepest center, one's inner being."¹⁶⁴ Bakke's insights on meditation serve to further the hypothesis that the meditation stage in *lectio divina* is part of its catalytic impact on spiritual growth. She states:

When we participate in verbal prayer or reading that leads to meditative prayer as an ongoing practice, we begin to slow down inside in ways that enable us to see differently. The action of slowing down influences ordinary life as well as prayer...Meditation invites us to pause and look more closely at interior and exterior details we do not notice at a greater distance and speed. It enlarges our recognition of the Holy Spirit's presence and encourages appreciation and worship...The act of slowing down influences what we see about God and ourselves....Little by little we open ourselves more freely to God and cooperate more fully with the Holy Spirit as we settle into deepening trust. It is as though we are discovering our true home where we enjoy satisfying companionship with God.¹⁶⁵

Prayer

In *lectio divina*, the transition from the stage of meditation to prayer may be almost indiscernible. There is, however, a progression from one to the other that is important to Leech:

The distinction between meditation and prayer goes back to the earliest Christian periods. When the ancient writers speak of prayer, they are careful to distinguish it from meditation which they consider to be the normal preparation for prayer. The main distinction which is made is that meditation is seen as an activity of mind and thought, while prayer is an activity of the whole being.¹⁶⁶

Leech's point is important because it shows the necessity of going beyond meditation to prayer. This involves the transition from deliberate mental effort to the affective nature of prayer. He quotes Anthony Bloom: "Meditation and prayer are often confused, but there

¹⁶⁴ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 172.

¹⁶⁵ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 201.

¹⁶⁶ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 171.

is no danger in this confusion if meditation develops into prayer; only when prayer degenerates into meditation.”¹⁶⁷

Demarest suggests a very simple formula for the stage of *lectio divina* called prayer. He says:

Return the Scripture you have just read to the Father by praising Him for its work in you. Talk to the Lord about your reading. Your petition might take the form of calm reasoning or an impassioned plea. Thank the Father for the grace that works through His Spirit and the Word. Ask Him to make experiential other biblical truths that have not yet found residence in your heart. Petition the Lord for the grace to obey His nourishing revelation.”¹⁶⁸

The other authors are not as specific about how to go about the kind of praying that evolves from meditation. Guenther’s quote from the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is a good reminder to avoid getting caught up in the mechanics of how we pray instead of just praying:

“Do not pray with words unless you are really drawn to this; or if you do pray with words, pay no attention to whether they are many or few. Do not weigh them in their meaning. Do not be concerned about what kind of prayers you use, for it is unimportant whether or not they are official liturgical prayers, psalms, hymns or anthems; whether they are for particular or general intentions; or whether you formulate them interiorly, by thoughts, or express them aloud, in words.”¹⁶⁹

These suggestions apply directly to *lectio divina* and are important because when one moves from meditation to prayer, it does not matter how one prays but only that one is responding to God from the heart.

¹⁶⁷ Leech, *Soul Friend*, 172.

¹⁶⁸ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 17.

¹⁶⁹ Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992), 70.

Contemplation

The fourth stage of *lectio divina* is contemplation. In his description of contemplation, Houston makes the essential observation that contemplation and meditation are not the same thing, though they are frequently confused with each other:

Meditation involves us in verbal and symbolic communication, where the mind is active, conscious of both our thoughts and feelings. In contemplation, God's presence is so intensely and intimately real that description of him gives way to the sheer awareness of his presence. Words and even thoughts are simply no longer necessary.¹⁷⁰

Simply put, contemplation is finding oneself in the presence of Jesus. Alluding to St. Teresa of Avila, Houston says that contemplation is experiencing the "mutuality of love" that exists in our friendship with God or, in other words, contemplation is the "manifestation of (that) friendship."¹⁷¹

Demarest has one of the most balanced and accessible definitions of contemplation:

The final stage of the *lectio* involves resting in the Lord's presence. This is the act of *simply being there with God*, and it acknowledges that He is the agent of spiritual growth. Resting in God's real presence has been called *the prayer of simple devotion. Simply being present to God in loving communion serves as the exclamation point to the meditative moment.*¹⁷²

Benner agrees and, referencing Evelyn Underhill, states: "In contemplation we experience God directly rather than merely thinking about him."¹⁷³ This kind of contemplation is not something a person can do for themselves, but it is a gift,¹⁷⁴ a gift

¹⁷⁰ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 262.

¹⁷¹ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 264.

¹⁷² Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 137.

¹⁷³ Benner, *Sacred Companions*, 29.

¹⁷⁴ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 59.

that they can prepare themselves to receive.¹⁷⁵ Houston addresses this with help from St. Teresa:

Teresa said that this friendship is activated by “conversing frequently and alone.” We can take the initiative in this, by making the time to be alone before God. But the actual mystical experiences of God’s presence come from God’s initiative. At that point, observes Teresa, we need not “a lot of thinking but rather a lot of loving.... This does not require much strength, just love and habit.”¹⁷⁶

Foster quotes Madame Guyon on the gift of contemplation: “We come now to the ultimate stage of Christian experience. Divine Union. This cannot be brought about merely by your own experience. Meditation will not bring divine union; neither will love, nor worship, nor your devotion, nor your sacrifice.... Eventually it will take an act of God to make union a reality.”¹⁷⁷ The emphasis on contemplation and union being a gift is critical—*lectio divina* or any other structure for prayer must not be seen as a method or technique to manipulate one’s way into a desired experience. They merely provide a person with a way to position their heart for the work God wants to do in them.

It seems to be difficult for modern authors to describe the stage of contemplation. Some authors I have read leave it out completely or substitute action instead. Demarest is an exception and states:

It isn’t difficult really, and it’s amazing how natural it becomes. Rest in the Lord, believing that as you draw near to God, he will draw near to you (James 4:8). Agree with the psalmist, who writes, “My heart has heard you say, ‘Come and talk with me.’ And my heart responds, ‘Lord I am coming’” (Psalm 27:8). In the sacred place of prayer sit, as it were, at the Lord’s feet. Yield your entire being to Him who owns you body, soul, and spirit (Romans 12:2).... Look to the Lord in faith with singular attentiveness. Listen for His voice. Sense His presence. Rest in

¹⁷⁵ Foster, *Prayer*, 160.

¹⁷⁶ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 264.

¹⁷⁷ Foster, *Prayer*, 159.

His love. Marvel at His purity, holiness, and how altogether right it is for Him to enact His judgments throughout the earth. Then lift your heart in love and adoration to God in whom you delight.¹⁷⁸

Bakke would agree with Demarest and adds, “When meditative prayer disappears, the Spirit may be drawing us toward contemplative prayer....This type of prayer often involves no words or fewer words. The experience of contemplative prayer is like tender, mutual love. It is more about our relationship with God and appreciating our relationship than about anything particular we might do.”¹⁷⁹ Silence and attentiveness are key components in contemplation. As Bakke points out, “Contemplation is the experience of one’s heart being touched by the Spirit of God who is Love. It is about one’s heart being so taken by this God that it waits in silence, with a loving attentiveness to this One who is Love. Nothing else matters. All our techniques and formulas are forgotten as we are being healed and restored by this transforming Love.”¹⁸⁰

Following are some descriptions of contemplation from saints across the centuries as cited by Demarest. They help add to our understanding of the nature and importance of contemplation:

Augustine (d. 430) describes the prayer of contemplation as a loving gaze of the human spirit directed toward God.

John Cassian (d. 435) wrote, The Lord establishes as the prime good contemplation, that is, the gaze turned in the direction of the things of God. Hence we say that the other virtues, however useful and good...must nevertheless be put on a secondary level, since they are all practiced for the sake of this one....The Lord locates the primary good not in activity, however praiseworthy, however abundantly fruitful, but in the truly simple and unified contemplation of Himself.

Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109), said this: Abandon yourself for a little to God and rest for a little in Him. Enter into the little chamber of your soul, shut out

¹⁷⁸ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 163.

¹⁷⁹ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 202.

¹⁸⁰ Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 203.

everything save God and what can be of help in your quest for Him and having locked the door seek Him out (Matt 6:6). Speak now, my whole heart, speak now to God: 'I seek Your countenance, O Lord, Your countenance I seek' (Ps 36:8).

Richard Baxter (d. 1691)...believed that the Reformers overreacted to Rome by vilifying certain spiritually edifying disciplines. Baxter wrote, "We are fled so far from superstitious solitude, that we have cast off the solitude of contemplative devotion." Setting your heart upon God in contemplation is a noble activity, for it "opens the door between the head and the heart" and "presents to the affections those things which are most important."

Brother Lawrence (d. 1691)...wrote, "I just make my business this: To persevere in His holy presence. I stay there by simple attention and by an absorbing passionate regard for God, which I want to call an *actual presence of God*."¹⁸¹

Bakke's discussion on the movement from meditation and prayer to contemplation is helpful in understanding why we may be drawn to contemplation as our prayer life changes. As we grow in prayer, we may spend less amount of time in mediation and prayer and be drawn more quickly toward contemplation. She says:

At some point, however, meditative prayer can also seem less alive. When we try to prepare ourselves to listen to God by using Scripture, devotional reading, or another means, we feel hindered rather than assisted in our loving attentiveness with God. Perhaps it feels as though Scripture is getting in the way. This does not mean we no longer need to read and think about Scripture; it merely indicates that our prayer may be changing....Little by little, we can dispose ourselves toward contemplative prayer by intending and learning how to be more available to God in the midst of everything, but we cannot work or think our way into such prayer. True contemplation is a gift. Happily, God seems to give glimpses of contemplative awareness and enjoyment to everyone.¹⁸²

As we look at Bakke's analysis of prayer in light of *lectio divina* as a prayer method, it is helpful to remember that *lectio divina* involves both meditation, prayer and contemplation but does not insist that these happen in a linear fashion or even that both occur in every prayer. This is where Bakke's assessment is particularly discerning.

¹⁸¹ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 164-166.

¹⁸² Bakke, *Holy Invitations*, 202-203.

Author	Reading	Meditation	Prayer	Contemplation
Richard Peace¹⁸³ (Protestant)	Read aloud. Listen for word or phrase that stands out.	Repeat aloud the word or phrase. Make connections to your life.	Offer thoughts back to God. Give thanks. Ask for guidance.	Rest in God's presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence.
Richard Foster¹⁸⁴ (Protestant)	Reading with a listening spirit.	Reflecting on what we are hearing. Floating on the depths of God.	Praying in response to this hearing. Rest simply and deeply on the currents of prayer.	Contemplating what we will carry forward into our lives. Obeying. Application.
David Benner¹⁸⁵ (Protestant)	Praying as attending.	Praying as pondering.	Praying as responding.	Praying as being. A gift of being in and with God.
Eugene Peterson¹⁸⁶ (Protestant)	We read the text. Looking at the words of the text.	We meditate the text. Entering the world of the text.	We pray the text. Responding to God revealed in the text.	We live the text. Submitting to the Biblical revelation.
M. Basil Pennington¹⁸⁷ (Catholic)	Acquaintanceship Listen to the Word. Receive a word of life.	Friendly Companionship Receptive process. Allowing the Word to break open and reform us.	Friendship Response. Communication with our God who loves us.	Union The love of just being with. Abide with God within his temple.
Michael Casey¹⁸⁸ (Catholic)	Understanding the text.	Contextualizing the meaning.	Living the meaning.	Meeting God in the text.
Thelma Hall¹⁸⁹ (Catholic)	"We read....." Reading and listening to the Word of God.	<i>under the eye of God.....</i> Reflecting on the Word.	<i>until the heart is touched.....</i> The Word touches the heart.	<i>and leaps to flame."</i> Entering the silence "Too deep for words."
Guigo II¹⁹⁰ (Catholic)	The careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one's powers on it.	The busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one's own reason for the knowledge of hidden truth.	The heart's devoted turning to God to drive away the evil and obtain what is good.	When the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.

Figure 3:1 Different Authors' Views of *Lectio Divina*

¹⁸³ Richard Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 12-13.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Foster, *Life with God*, 63-69.

¹⁸⁵ David Benner, *Opening to God*, 53.

¹⁸⁶ Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 91, 99, 109, 112.

¹⁸⁷ M. Basil, Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 61, 64, 66, 108.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 57.

¹⁸⁹ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, 36, 44.

¹⁹⁰ Guigo II, *Ladder of Monks*, 68.

Differing Views of Contemplation and the Goal of Prayer

Some object to meditation and contemplation on the ground that they are unbiblical and border on eastern religious practices. McGrath's explanation of Guigo's four-stage reading of the biblical text is particularly helpful:

Guigo argues that we begin by reading the text of Scripture, in full expectation that we shall encounter something of God in doing so. This leads us on to meditate on what we find – not in the sense of emptying our minds of everything, but rather allowing our minds to focus and concentrate upon the meaning and imagery of the text, with all external thoughts being excluded. This leads us to prayer as the only appropriate response to what we encounter. Finally, this leads to a quiet entrance into the presence of God in contemplation.¹⁹¹

Pennington's explanation of "contemplation" describes something that many have experienced without putting that name to it. According to Pennington, although enlightening the mind and motivating the will are important, the goal in *lectio divina* is to seek God himself. "We come seeking the experience of the presence of the living God, to be with him and to allow him to be with us in whatever way he wishes...Lectio is essentially prayer at a deep experiential level."¹⁹²

Peterson would disagree with McGrath's and Pennington's ideas about contemplation. He says that contemplation is *living what we read*.¹⁹³ Similarly, Foster equates contemplation with obedience.¹⁹⁴ (Note that in another source, Foster's description of "contemplative prayer" is very similar to the traditional stage of

¹⁹¹ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 85.

¹⁹² Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 27.

¹⁹³ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 113.

¹⁹⁴ Foster, *Life with God*, 63.

contemplation in *lectio divina*.¹⁹⁵) I would agree that obedience should be the *fruit* of a prayer-filled life, but I do not see it as one and the same as contemplation. The “living-out” of what one reads cannot take place outside of the transformation that occurs when one encounters the living God. It is as a person gets a glimpse of who God is and how much he loves them that they are changed into his likeness. If one eliminates contemplation and encounter with God, then it will be much easier to fall into the trap of trying to transform oneself. This is precisely why Fee says that there can be no spirituality without “life by the Spirit.”¹⁹⁶

It is interesting how Willard describes loving God and thinking of God. I think he is actually describing what takes place in *lectio divina* but is using words that are more accessible to the evangelical mainstream. For example, he says, “To bring the mind to dwell intelligently upon God as he is presented in his Word will have the effect of causing us to love God passionately, and this love will in turn bring us to think of God steadily.”¹⁹⁷ Willard also quotes Thomas Watson, who uses terms that are associated with the contemplative stream: “The first fruit of love is the musing of the mind upon God. He who loves God is ravished and transported with the contemplation of God. Can we say that we are ravished with delight when we think on God? Oh how far are they from being lovers of God, who scarcely ever think about God!”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 155-165.

¹⁹⁶ Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text*, 6.

¹⁹⁷ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 106.

¹⁹⁸ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 106-107.

Casey writes, "*Lectio divina* is an expression of my search for God. Sacred reading can be considered 'successful' only if it causes me to drop my defenses and allow God to touch my heart and change my life."¹⁹⁹

Infused vs. Acquired Contemplation

Why is it difficult to find consistency and depth in recent Protestant writing on contemplation? It is possible that Foster and other authors believe that the gift of contemplation is very infrequent or is reserved for a few elite saints and that is why they are reluctant to include it their writing. It also seems to be the case that most Protestant writers do not have the same definition of *lectio divina* as Catholic authors especially for the stage of contemplation. This could be because contemplation has a rich history and is better understood in Catholic circles.

It is interesting that, in his section on the spheres of prayer, Houston describes a different kind of prayer that he calls "ecstatic." He says that "to experience ecstasy in prayer means that we are taken out of ourselves; we are no longer in control because the love of God controls us instead."²⁰⁰ Foster divides contemplative prayer into three steps, the last of which he calls spiritual ecstasy.²⁰¹ The ecstatic prayer may be a less frequent occurrence but is still part of contemplation. Among Catholic authors it is sometimes known as infused contemplation. The distinction between two types of contemplation may be helpful because it allows for the possibility for contemplation to be a common experience of all Christians. This, in fact is the very reason that the term "acquired

¹⁹⁹ Casey, *Sacred Reading*, 63.

²⁰⁰ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 265.

²⁰¹ Foster, *Prayer*, 164.

contemplation” was used after the time of St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, so as to give credence to the contemplative experience of many.

Acquired contemplation was distinct or not as “profound” as what John and Teresa described as “infused contemplation.” Some may be able to accept (acquired) contemplation as described by Houston if they can move the more mystical (infused) experiences to another category such as “ecstatic” prayer. I would suggest that many praying Christians have experienced acquired contemplation without recognizing what was happening. Pennington, commenting on the work of another author, says:

I find the identification of contemplation with what is called infused contemplation unfortunate. The author seems to imply that it is a relatively rare thing, and that one just has to wait until it comes. This presentation contains shades of the idea that used to be quite prevalent: contemplation was only for very special people like enclosed nuns. The rest of us had to keep at it with active forms of prayer and maybe, just maybe, before we died, we might be gifted with this experience of God. In fact, I think what some authors have called acquired contemplation (I am not too happy with the terminology) is quite common. A decision to rest in the Lord with a simple word of love is something that anyone who loves the Lord receives the grace to do....And this alone is a form of contemplation.²⁰²

Everyone can experience what is called “acquired contemplation” by focusing the eyes of their heart on God himself. Essentially it is the cultivation of an intimate relationship with God by being attentive and available to him, looking into his heart and letting him look into theirs.

Some helpful insights into the definition of acquired contemplation may be gained from Houston: “Contemplative prayer means drawing close to God, so that we are in his presence simply to listen, and be drawn close to his love.”²⁰³ This is the same thing that

²⁰² Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, 89-90.

²⁰³ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 192.

King David describes: “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple” (Ps 27:4). It seems that understanding this kind of gazing will help dispel misunderstandings of contemplation currently seen in the evangelical world. Resting, gazing, enjoying, loving passionately, drawing close and listening are terms that are acceptable, desirable and even essential in the spiritual growth of all Christian disciples.

The Costs and Joys of Encounter

Lectio divina is one valuable means by which believers may encounter the living God and be drawn into his presence and be transformed into his likeness. This spiritual growth process involves both costs and joys. Houston says, “So in order to become prayerful people, there are costs that we must accept. True prayer involves agreeing to conditions that reflect the character of the God to whom we are relating.”²⁰⁴ I agree that costs certainly accompany a life of deepening prayer. But I would add that, while at the beginning (and perhaps during specific seasons of our lives), these may seem like costly sacrifices, with time they become true joys. This is a process of growth in which we find that the more we surrender to and trust God, the more we delight in abandoning ourselves to him. The more we encounter him, the more we trust him. This is true because he will always prove himself faithful to us.

This theme of apparent risk involved in encountering God appears regularly in the readings. Houston makes what I consider to be a very important statement about a life of prayer: “Prayer will always remain a vague, safe exercise until we are impacted by God.

²⁰⁴ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 62.

This happens when we stop looking at ourselves through the mask that we like to wear for other people, and start to see ourselves as God actually sees us.”²⁰⁵ There may be a cost or risk involved initially because of having to give up entrenched habits of hiding and unbelief to embrace what may seem to be a conflicting truth. Admitting unbelief and moving into relationship of genuine confidence before God can be a wrenching, life changing experience. This is how Houston puts it: “To be a Christian is to be ‘shocked’ by Christ. He has encountered us. Our defenses have been shattered. We have heard the shocking call to abandon our much-loved securities and to follow him. The cult of self-fulfillment, which makes us so selfish and self-directed, creates a brittleness in us that simply shatters when we meet God personally.”²⁰⁶ Houston makes the assertion that if one desires to live a life of prayer, one’s life will remain in conflict.²⁰⁷ One will never be exempt from temptations, trials or spiritual battles. This is one of the true costs of faith. Encountering God allows a Christian to experience true fulfillment and soon enables them to leave behind those things to which they have looked for satisfaction. Yes, there is a cost, but there is a greater reward! “...the life of prayer is a call to exchange the less important for the more important.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 62.

²⁰⁶ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 63.

²⁰⁷ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 68.

²⁰⁸ Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer*, 65.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROCEDURES AND RESEARCH DESIGN

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I
will not neglect your word.

—Psalm 119:15-16

Introduction

The theory that *lectio divina* will serve as a catalyst for spiritual growth is supported by the biblical and theological foundation set forth in the second chapter. Likewise, the authors surveyed in the literature review in the third chapter support the idea that the relational, transformational prayer discipline of *lectio divina* is a beneficial means of spiritual growth. This chapter begins with a restatement of the specific ministry context and additional background information so as to better inform the project outline. This chapter also delineates the methodology and procedure used during the course of this thesis-project. All materials and survey instruments used during the course of the thesis-project are presented in appendices. Some concerns inherent to this type of research are also addressed.

The principal question that was the impetus for this research and thesis-project was “Can *lectio divina* be an effective catalyst for spiritual growth in the life of Christians?” The procedure used to investigate the answer to this question was a six-week one-group,¹ pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental design in which participants were introduced to *lectio divina* as a method of prayer and were then asked to use it three times per week for six weeks during their individual prayer times.

¹ This was a “group” for research purposes only. The participants took part individually and never met together as a group.

Ministry Background Narrative

The background for this thesis-project is best explained vis-à-vis evolving ministry opportunities over the course of the last fifteen years. During my time on the leadership team at the All Nations House of Prayer from 2004-2009, I helped develop and teach discipleship and Bible study classes for interns and church members who were interested in growing in their relationship with God. My desire was to combine elements from my past experience in leading and writing Bible studies with what I had been recently learning about contemplative prayer and Bible meditation. I began to do this while teaching a study on Song of Songs, by adding reflective type questions and exercises throughout the course. This course eventually became a book. From the feedback offered by class members, I realized that the most effective and transforming parts of the study were the time students spent meditating on and praying through the Scripture passages and their development of the disciplines of silence and listening.

In 2007 I began to work with a related local ministry that acted as a resource for pastors and churches who desired to grow prayer in their congregations. It was during this time that I helped develop and author a series of devotional prayer guides that used a modified version of *lectio divina* designed to lead people into the experience of Bible meditation and encountering God. These guides, however, were designed primarily for group use, and it became apparent that there was a need for materials that could be used easily by individuals as well as in a group setting. As I began to study more about *lectio divina* and see the historical value and success of this prayer method, I ran up against objections from several Protestants toward anything that they feared might hint of New Age, Catholicism, or what they perceived to be mysticism. This problem prompted me to

translate the concept and terms of traditional *lectio divina* into acceptable phraseology for the Protestant context. Eventually, after several rejected terms, this led to calling *lectio divina* “Scripture-based reflective prayer.”²

During this same time I began to work in an advisory capacity with a Catholic adult group that was involved in promoting prayer and discipleship within their congregation. In the fall of 2010 I began to design another series of prayer guides to meet the needs of this group. They were intended primarily for individual use but also served to form the basis of discussion for group meetings as well. Because of my own Protestant ministry context, I also developed a separate but parallel set of guides that would be appropriate and acceptable and which did not use the terms “*lectio divina*,” “meditation” or “contemplation.” Because of the negative connotations of the names of the last two stages of *lectio divina* (meditation and contemplation), I decided to call the four stages “Reading,” “Reflecting,” “Responding” and “Resting.” The Catholic versions needed no translation; in fact, the term *lectio divina* was quite familiar to many and there seemed to be no objection to “contemplation” or “meditation.” This thesis-project draws directly from the prayer guides and uses materials from the two versions adapted to the different needs of Protestants and Catholics. The two versions are virtually the same except for the terminology used to describe *lectio divina*. Catholic participants received the version designed for Catholics and Protestant participants received the version designed for Protestants.

² In September 2010, I surveyed eight Protestants from different denominations to test the use of the term *lectio divina*. In every instance the person associated the term with Catholicism and I was urged not to use it. “Meditative Prayer,” “Contemplative Prayer” and “Bible Meditation” were also rejected. The term “Scripture-based Reflective Prayer” was seen as safe since it was by definition centered on Scripture.

Project Methodology

The research question explored by this thesis project is: Can *lectio divina* be an effective catalyst for spiritual growth in the life of Christians? The goal of this thesis-project was to engage the participants in an intensive experience of using *lectio divina* on a regular basis over the course of a six-week period. The desired outcome was to see each participant realize perceived growth in their personal relationship with God and to develop a greater sense of intimacy with God through the discipline of *lectio divina*. This thesis-project was a one-group,³ pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental design and used open-ended questions to collect the participants' self-evaluations of their spiritual life and growth. The majority of the data collected was qualitative in nature. A comparison of pre- and post-project survey evaluations along with the weekly response sheets was used to measure the progress of each individual's perceived growth.

Research Participants

It was decided to invite participants from a wide range of locations, denominations and backgrounds. An invitation letter was sent to prospective participants explaining the project and asking them to consider taking part. The entire invitation letter can be seen in Appendix A.

A common factor among the thirty-eight participants was some familiarity with the researcher. Participants were also invited because of their spiritual maturity and familiarity with the Scriptures. One half of the participants were colleagues from Wycliffe Bible Translators. This was intentional because of my desire to determine the

³ Before beginning this thesis-project there was a possibility that there would be two distinct groups, one Protestant and one Catholic. After the data was collected, there were two reasons that the participants were combined into one group: 1. There were not enough Catholics for a viable independent sample; 2. There were no substantial differences between the Protestant and Catholic responses.

effectiveness of *lectio divina* among those with whom I have worked for over twenty-eight years and the viability of its use in our organization. I also included other non-missionary members of various churches in order to see if there was a distinct difference between missionaries and non-missionaries. These participants were members of our prayer and financial partnership team. Because of my involvement with Catholic ministry, I also wanted to examine the effectiveness of *lectio divina* among this group and possibly see if there were any discernible differences between the effect of *lectio divina* on the spiritual growth of Protestants vs. Catholics. Therefore, a small number of Catholics was invited to participate. They made up 21% of the total group. Protestant participants were from a variety of denominations.⁴ Of the entire group surveyed, 71% were female and 29% male. These statistics are summarized in figure 4:1.



Figure 4:1 Demographic Data

Participants were grouped in four age categories: 18-25; 26-40; 41-60; 60+. Of the thirty-eight participants, thirty-two were over forty and sixteen were over the age of

⁴ The Protestant participants self-identified their denominational affiliation as follows: Independent Bible Church-1, Christian and Missionary Alliance-2, United Methodist-5, Non-denominational-6, Southern Baptist-1, Community-1, Bible Church-3, Vineyard-2, Conservative Evangelical-1, Baptist-3, Evangelical-1, Presbyterian-3, Presbyterian Church USA-1, Baptist General Conference-1, Presbyterian Church in America-1, Charismatic Bible Church-2. (Note: the number of denominations slightly exceeds the number of participants because four identified themselves with more than one denomination.)

sixty. Only five were between 26-40 and one was 18-25. The age ranges of the participants, broken down by gender, are summarized in figure 4:2.

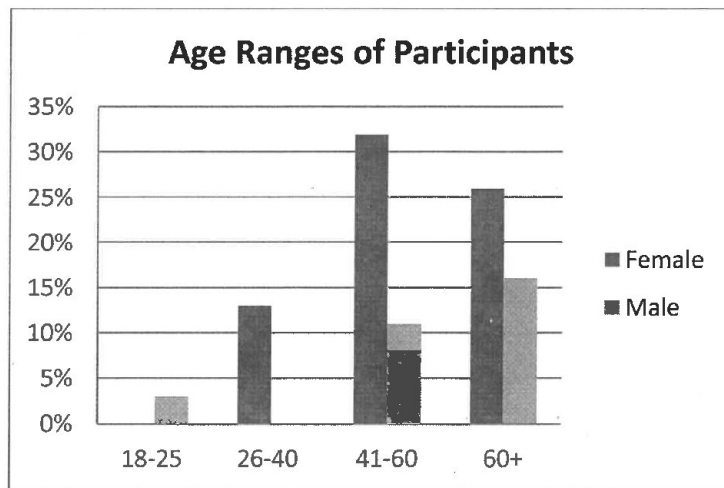


Figure 4:2 Age Ranges

Each participant was also asked how many years they had been a Christian.⁵ There were four categories: less than 2 years; 2-9; 10-20; 20+. Of the thirty-eight participants 84% had been Christians for more than 20 years; 11% had been Christians for 10-20 years; 5% had been Christians for less than 2 years. The number of years that the participants reported being a Christian, broken down by gender is summarized in figure 4:3.

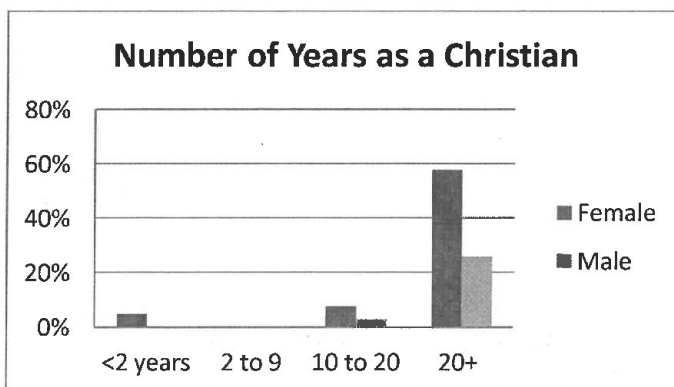


Figure 4:3 Number of Years as a Christian

⁵ For Catholics this question was worded, "How long have you been actively pursuing your relationship with God?"

Procedure and Materials

An invitation letter was sent to each prospective participant to ask them to consider taking part in this study. Upon their acceptance, each participant was given a three-ring binder that included an informed consent document, pre-project survey form, prayer guide, quick reference card, weekly response sheets, post-project survey form, and a pre-stamped envelope in which to return the forms to the researcher. The study packets containing the binder with all the forms needed were hand delivered or mailed out in mid-August, 2011, and the last survey results envelope was returned to the researcher on October 21, 2011. The majority of the participants completed their six week study within six to seven weeks; a few participants asked for extra time due to family summer vacations and business travel. Initially, forty-eight individuals indicated an interest in participating in the study and received the study packet; nine of these were unable to complete the materials and did not return any forms to the researcher. Of the thirty-nine participants who returned their packets, one did not complete all three evaluative instruments and, as a result, was not included in the study. This left a total of thirty-eight participants who completed all aspects of the study and were included in the analysis and results.

Informed Consent Document

Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent document in order to apprise them of the parameters of the study and to obtain their permission to use the data collected by this project. The document guaranteed each participant that their name would never be associated with the results collected from them and that confidentiality

would be maintained throughout the project. The informed consent document can be found in Appendix B.

Instructions and Introduction to Lectio Divina.

Each participant was given detailed instructions on how to use the materials and what to do with them when they were finished. A short explanation of the four stages of *lectio divina* was provided to introduce the participants to this way of praying and to give them sufficient information to be able to use the prayer guide. There were some wording differences between the Protestant and Catholic versions. The Protestant instruction sheet and introduction may be found in Appendix C and the Catholic version in Appendix D.

Prayer Guide and Quick Reference Card

A prayer guide used during the six-week study was designed to help introduce the participants to the concept of *lectio divina* and to give them enough time to develop the habits taught by this prayer method. Each participant was given a six-week prayer guide that included instructions, a background and an introduction to the four stages of *lectio divina* and journal pages. They were asked to use *lectio divina* three times per week for six weeks. A different passage of Scripture was provided for each day along with abbreviated instructions and space to write out their reflections. It was made clear that these reflections were not to be returned to the author but were for personal use only. This was done so that the participants would be able to enjoy their prayer time and freely record their insights, prayers and thoughts, knowing that no one would be looking at their personal reflections from their time with God. A quick reference card was also included to provide easy access to a summary of the four stages. The Scripture verses for each week focused on a particular theme. Familiar short passages of from four to eight verses

were deliberately chosen from a variety of biblical genres to give the participants a wide range of experience during their exposure to *lectio divina*. This was also done to accommodate the various backgrounds, experiences and preferences of those participating. The Protestant version of the prayer guide used the New International Version of the Bible, and the Catholic prayer guide used the New Revised Standard (Catholic Edition).

The prayer guide designed for use by Protestant participants was entitled “Scripture-based Reflective Prayer: A Six-Week Journey” and the guide used by Catholic participants was called “*Lectio Divina*: Encountering God through the Ancient Practice of Sacred Reading—A Six-Week Journey in Prayer.” In order to emphasize the idea of listening to God as he reveals the truth of his Word, both notebook covers featured the verse, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). A picture was used on the Protestant guide, and an icon was used on the Catholic version, each portraying Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The complete Protestant prayer guide can be found in Appendix E along with the Catholic version of the prayer guide cover and quick reference card.

Survey Instruments

A number of instruments were used in this study to obtain data and evaluate the impact on each individual.

Pre-project Survey

The first instrument was a pre-project survey designed to provide the researcher with demographic information as well as a self-evaluation of each participant’s satisfaction with their personal spiritual growth and experience of prayer. All participants

were asked to complete the pre-project survey form before beginning the project. The pre-project survey form was linked to the post-project survey form by use of an ID number so that the results from the same individual could be compared. The first section of the pre-project survey asked for demographic information such as gender, age, length of time as a Christian and denominational background. These questions were not repeated in the post-project survey since the forms were linked. The next section contained nine interview-type questions. Four questions addressed the individual's current perception of the state of their own spiritual life:

- How would you describe your current spiritual life?
- Do you believe that your spiritual life has grown significantly in the past three years? ___Yes ___No. If yes, in what area(s) has the change occurred?
- Overall, how would you describe your satisfaction with your own spiritual life today?
- How would you describe your desire to grow spiritually right now?

Three questions addressed their definition of prayer, their prayer habits and their desire to grow in prayer:

- How would you define prayer to a new Christian?
- Briefly describe your own prayer life.
- What aspects of your prayer life would you like to change or grow in?

The last two questions addressed the use of Scripture in the individual's personal prayer life:

- Do you regularly reflect or meditate on Scripture? (as opposed to study) ___Yes ___No. If Yes, please describe.
- Do you regularly use Scripture when you pray? ___Yes ___No. If Yes, how?

The entire Protestant pre-project survey form can be found in Appendix F and the Catholic version in Appendix G.

The benefit of this survey was that it provided a means for obtaining baseline information on the participants' current spiritual life, their desire to grow in prayer and their assumptions regarding prayer and the use of Scripture in prayer. One concern with this type of survey is its possible limitation due to its basis in subjective evaluation of an individual's own spiritual condition. This self-perception may not be totally accurate and can be influenced by outside factors and circumstances. For the purposes of this thesis-project, however, it is understood that the individual's self-evaluation is, in fact, what is being examined to measure the impact of *lectio divina* on their spiritual growth.

Weekly Response Sheets

The second assessment instrument used in this study was a journal-type response sheet with open-ended questions designed to assess each participant's experience of prayer during each of the six weeks of the study. At the end of each week the participants were asked to reflect on their prayer experience for that week in the form of a journal entry. This feedback was intended to help the individual assess their own experience and to provide the researcher with a progressive evaluation over the six-week period. Since most participants were not located locally, these responses took the place of a group discussion or an interview. The instructions made it clear that these sheets would be returned to the author. The participants were invited to respond to any or all of the following questions:

- How would you describe your overall experience of prayer this week?
- How did you experience God speaking to you?

- How did you notice God's presence with you?
- Why did you enjoy or not enjoy your prayer time this week?
- What was the best thing about using Reflective Scripture-based Prayer (or "*lectio divina*" in the Catholic version) as a guide for your time with God?
- Did you have any difficulties?

A sample weekly response sheet can be found in Appendix H.

The concern with regards to journal-type response is that the participants' journaling may be influenced by the knowledge that their entries would be read, analyzed and used as an evaluative instrument for a doctoral level research project. In an attempt to encourage individuals to journal freely, it was made clear that names would not be associated with responses. Also, a three-ring binder was provided so that the Prayer guide pages containing personal reflections and prayers could be easily kept separate from the weekly response sheets that were to be returned to the researcher.

Post-project Survey

The third assessment instrument used was a post-project survey designed to determine how, if at all, the participants had been impacted by using *lectio divina* in their personal prayer time. Each participant was asked to complete the post-project survey form at the end of the six-weeks. The participant information section addressed whether or not the participant completed all parts of the project. The next section contained seven open-ended questions. Three questions addressed the participant's definition of prayer, desire to pray and satisfaction with their spiritual life in order to assess if these had changed over the course of the study:

- How has your definition of prayer changed (if at all) as a result of participating in this study?

- How has your desire to pray changed (if at all) as a result of participating in this study?
- Overall, how would you describe your satisfaction with your own spiritual life today?

One question addressed the participant's self-evaluation of their spiritual growth as a result of using *lectio divina*:

- Do you think that the use of Scripture-based reflective prayer has helped you to grow spiritually over the course of the last 6 weeks? Why or why not?

One question asked if the participant would continue to use this type of prayer in the future:

- Do you intend to pursue this kind of prayer in the future? ____Yes ____No.
Why or why not?

Two questions addressed the effectiveness and content of the prayer guide and suggestions for improvement:

- How would you evaluate the contents and effectiveness of the prayer guide?
- How could the materials used in this study be improved?

The entire post-project survey can be found in Appendix I.

Expected Outcomes

It was expected that the responses from the post-project surveys and weekly response sheets would reveal positive outcomes in the self-evaluation of a majority of participants' perception of their spiritual growth as a result of using *lectio divina*. It was further expected that a comparison of the pre and post-project surveys would reveal a change in the definition of prayer among the participants. Another expectation was that the participants would gain an increased appreciation for Scripture and for hearing God speak to them through it, resulting in a desire to continue to use the practice of *lectio*

divina in the future. It was hypothesized that individuals who did not normally use Scripture as a basis for their personal prayer time and who were not used to the slow pace of *lectio divina* would benefit in some way from a structured time of meditating on Scripture, listening to God, responding to him as he spoke to them and learning to rest in his presence. Increased desire to pray and satisfaction with their spiritual life were also expected to be an outcome of this study especially among those who considered themselves to be dissatisfied with or stalled in their spiritual lives.

General Concerns

One general concern regarding the nature of this study is that fact that the researcher had no face-to-face interaction with a majority of the participants. An attempt was made to answer anticipated questions both through the informed consent document and the instruction pages of the prayer guide. Several follow up emails were sent to all participants inviting questions or comments in case of any problems. Only one person asked for additional information. It seems that due to the high level of spiritual maturity of the majority of participants, perhaps little additional explanation was needed. Another concern about the results of this study involves the fact that participants came from a small limited, volunteer sampling. The results may not be consistent with a random sampling from a wider group. However, the nature of this study it is that is by necessity, voluntary and the specific goals of the researcher are reflected in the choice of participants. A third concern is that life experience during the course of the study may have impacted an individual's participation in one way or another. Indeed, this did come into play as some needed extra time because of job or family responsibilities. A final concern involved the sensitive nature of the required responses. Writing about the

intimate subject of one's experience of prayer and spiritual growth could make a participant uncomfortable and, as a result, may not be entirely objective. It is also possible that the results could be skewed by answers that the participants thought they should write rather than what actually occurred.

This thesis-project was designed to determine the effectiveness of *lectio divina* as a catalyst for the spiritual growth of the participants. The pre and post-project survey questions as well as the weekly response sheet collected qualitative data to see if there had been a perceived change as a result of using the *lectio divina* prayer method. The nature and results of this data will be discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

—2 Corinthians 3:18

This chapter will present the results of the research done in this thesis-project to determine if *lectio divina* can be used as an effective catalyst for spiritual growth. Each participant completed a pre- and post-project survey along with weekly response sheets. These instruments were used to determine whether or not a participant's understanding and practice of prayer had changed over the course of the six weeks and whether or not they perceived growth in their spiritual lives. The surveys also asked whether or not the person intended to continue with *lectio divina* in the future and why. The survey results were examined using the cumulative reported experiences of the participants to determine whether or not *lectio divina* had acted as a catalyst for spiritual growth in their lives. The participants' self-evaluation provided the source of data in this study. Common themes emerging from the post-project survey and weekly response sheets were used to test the hypothesis that a positive correlation exists between the use of *lectio divina* and spiritual growth in the lives of Christians. The analysis of the responses from the post-project survey and weekly response sheets revealed that there was a strong positive correlation between the use of *lectio divina* and self-reported spiritual growth.

Pre-Project Survey Results

Thirty-eight of the forty participants submitted completed pre-project survey forms at the end of the project. This represents an unusually high return rate of 95%. In this chapter, each question is presented in the order it is found on the pre-project survey form (see Appendix F and G), followed by a descriptive analysis of the results and representative examples of the participants' responses.¹ Each pre-project survey question is hereafter referred to as PreQ1, PreQ2, etc. Due to the qualitative nature of the data collected, special attention was given to identifying general themes that emerged in the responses to a particular question. Representative participant comments were grouped into similar categories to illustrate the trends and issues that arose.

PreQ1

PreQ1 asked, "How would you describe your current spiritual life?" The participants' responses to this question generally fell into one of three categories:

Category 1: Growing

Category 2: Indiscernible growth / Slow growth

Category 3: Stalled

Representative answers are provided below and grouped according to the three categories, along with the percentage of respondents in that category:

Category 1: Growing (45%)

- "Mature but growing, intense, active."
- "Growing with plenty of room for improvement."
- "Growing, desiring greater intimacy with Jesus."

¹ All responses are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

- “On fire for the Lord.”

Category 2: Indiscernible growth / Slow growth (37%)

- “Growing slowly and almost indiscernibly but with an increasing hunger for more.”
- “Growing slowly.”
- “Growing but quiet.”
- “I would say growing although not as fast as I would like. I still have a long way to go.”

Category 3: Stalled (18%)

- “Stalled but with a desire to grow.”
- “In personal and direct spiritual growth I am stalled.”
- “Plateaued.”
- “Virtually non-existent spiritual life for several years.”

As seen above, the majority of participants reported some degree of recent growth when describing their spiritual life. Two significant themes emerged from the answers to PreQ1. Most often mentioned was the acknowledgement of the need for continual growth; participants in all three categories stated that there was room for improvement or growth in some area. The second most commonly mentioned theme was the longing or desire for more growth or a hunger for a deeper relationship with God.

PreQ2

PreQ2 asked, “Do you believe that your spiritual life has grown significantly in the past three years? ___Yes ___No. If yes, in what area(s) has the change occurred?” In response to this question, 79% of the thirty-eight participants reported some significant recent growth while 21% reported none. The various areas of growth and the percentage

of participants who mentioned them include (some responses contained comments from more than one area):

- Character change (32%)
- Understanding of God's grace/love (23%)
- Trust and faith in God (16%)
- Prayer (16%)
- Bible study/memorization (13%)
- Self-understanding/acceptance (13%)
- Intercessory prayer (5%)
- Intimacy with God (3%)
- Apologetics (3%)

PreQ3

PreQ3 asked, "Overall, how would you describe your satisfaction with your own spiritual life today?" Two categories of participants emerged in the responses to this question:

Category 1: "Satisfied" (The answers in this category ranged from very satisfied to somewhat satisfied but wanting to grow.)

Category 2: "Not satisfied" (The answers in this category ranged from not satisfied to very dissatisfied.)

Two participants did not complete the question. Representative responses are provided below, grouped according to the two categories, along with the percentage of respondents in that category:

Category 1: Satisfied (39%)

- "Satisfied that I have an intimate spiritual life with the Lord with the knowledge that there is always room for growth."

- “Growing satisfaction and peace. Am constantly learning—sometimes a lot, a little, nothing at all but growing in love and trusting in God.”
- “I am so glad to be where I am because it is so much better than I was...but I feel an urgency to get so much further. So, satisfied? Yes and no.”
- “Satisfied but reaching for more.”

Category 2: Not Satisfied (61%)

- “I would like to be more intentional, deliberate and intense in my faith journey. As a result of my current state I am not satisfied.”
- “I’m never satisfied. There is always an area to grow in. It seems the more I grow, the more I see other areas that need growth that I didn’t recognize before.”
- “I am kind of bored with it. I have seemed to be in a rut.”
- “I am not satisfied that I am spending the time I should in prayer and becoming closer the Lord.”
- “I am very dissatisfied that I have let my spiritual growth falter.”
- “Not very satisfied. I know what I should do but don’t.”

PreQ4

PreQ4 asked, “How would you describe your desire to grow spiritually right now?” All of the participants indicated that they had some desire to grow spiritually.

Their responses fit within two general categories:

Category 1: Strong/high/eager desire to grow

Category 2: Moderate desire/growing desire/want to grow

Two participants did not answer the question. Representative answers are provided below and grouped according to the two categories, along with the percentage of respondents in that category:

Category 1: Strong/high/eager desire to grow (61%)

- “I want to grow! I want to want to grow! I don’t want to lapse into apathy/stagnation/doldrums.”
- “I have a great desire for spiritual growth.”
- “Off the charts. Intense spiritual hunger for more.”
- “Eager!”
- “I am excited to begin; it’s an answer to prayer for me. Thank you!”

Category 2: Moderate desire/growing desire/want to grow (39%)

- “Moderate. I start to read the word or pray but become distracted.”
- “A growing desire to grow in my spiritual life and to be more conformed to Christ.”
- “Yes, I desire to know him better and understand his ways.”
- “Moderate. Hard to visualize what a better prayer time would actually be like.”

PreQ5

PreQ5 asked, “How would you define prayer to a new Christian?” The responses to this question can be grouped together under three major themes:

Major Theme 1: Communication with God

Major Theme 2: Giving thanks and praise to God

Major Theme 3: Relationship with God

Other, less frequently cited aspects of prayer and the percentage of respondents who mentioned them were:

Minor Theme 1: Sharing concerns (13%)

Minor Theme 2: Confession of sin (13%)

Minor Theme 3: Interceding for others (13%)

Minor Theme 4: Asking for help/direction (11%)

Minor Theme 5: Practicing God's presence (5%).

Representative responses are provided below grouped according to the three major themes and the percentage of respondents who mentioned that them (some responses contained comments from more than one theme):

Major Theme 1: Communication with God (95%)

- "A two way communication, expressing the desires of our heart and listening to His Holy Spirit."
- "Sometimes talking with God sometimes listening to God."
- "Prayer is a verbal communication with the Lord. It can be in a group or alone. It is meant to be a two-way communication between you and the Lord."
- "Prayer is communicating two-way with our Creator and Savior, sharing your heart with Someone who cares and will respond through a variety of ways."

Major Theme 2: Giving thanks and praise to God (26%)

- "Expressing praise and thanks to him."
- "...telling him all the good things he has and is doing and thanking and praising him for his goodness, kindness and mercy."
- "Acknowledging who he is; praising and thanking him."

Major Theme 3: Relationship/Friendship with God (21%)

- "Friendship with God. Prayer is to our spiritual life what breathing is to our physical life."
- "Prayer is the essential, relational interface between me and the Father. Prayer is the intentional activity of knowing and being known."
- "Speak to him as your best friend, the ultimate daddy who hears and answers."
- "Talking to an unseen friend who also created me and knows me and the world inside out."

PreQ6

PreQ6 asked, “Briefly describe your own prayer life.” Of the thirty-eight participants one did not answer this question. When describing their prayer life, thirty-six of thirty-seven participants (97%) stated that they talk to God in prayer. These can be divided into two categories according to whether or not they mentioned that listening to God is part of their prayer life:

Category 1: Stated that their prayer life involves listening to God.

Category 2: No mention of listening to God as part of their prayer life.

Select representative answers are given below, along with the percentage of participants in that category:²

Category 1: Stated that their prayer life involves listening to God. (30%)

- “Prayer is a delight! I mostly talk but am finding the past few years myself doing more listening. I pray all throughout the day.”
- “Prayer is a time I can speak to God and listen and I try to set time daily to talk to God. Adoration I try to do once a week to just sit and pray with God. It is a delight and relief from everyday life just to be with God.”
- “I’m a talker, so I’m praying throughout the day but when I finally just quiet myself to listen, he is faithful to speak.”

Category 2: Did not state that listening to God is part of their prayer life. (70%)

- “I don’t have dedicated prayer time. I pray short prayers throughout the day as I am thankful or need help.”
- “I pray in bed, before getting up—it’s just talking to God about the upcoming day. I pray before all meals, very grateful for my many blessings. I pray with friends, often for specific needs. I mostly talk.”

² See Appendix J for a more complete listing of representative responses.

- “Brief praises, largely intercession for others. Mostly talking, it’s not exactly a delight but a bit more than a duty.”
- “It’s a delight. I have prayer letters from sixty or so friends plus Operation World; lots of praise not just requests; detailed prayer lists.”

PreQ7

PreQ7 asked, “What aspects of your prayer life would you like to change or grow in?” Respondents mentioned different areas of prayer in which they most desired improvement. Three major themes emerged in the responses:

Theme 1: Increased focus/discipline/consistency in prayer

Theme 2: Increased ability to listen to God in prayer

Theme 3: Deepening relationship with God/awareness of God’s presence

Representative responses are provided below grouped according to the three primary themes and the percentage of respondents who mentioned a desire to grow in that area (some responses contained comments from more than one theme):

Theme 1: Increased focus/discipline/consistency in prayer (50%)

- “Regularity and focus. I think I should be doing more.”
- “I would like to be in conversation with God in everything I do throughout the day.”
- “I feel my prayer life is not pervasive enough. It’s so easy in the rush of daily activity to forget about prayer and just lean on my own understanding.”
- “Be more disciplined and use Bible more in prayer.”
- “I want to be consistent. Some days my prayer time is short, sometimes on the fly, sometimes an hour or more.”

Theme 2: Increased ability to listen to God in prayer (37%)

- “...do more listening and waiting on Him—not be so rushed.”
- “Grow in hearing and recognizing the Lord’s voice.”

- “More listening, greater faith and trust that his timing is perfect.”
- “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.”

Theme 3: Deepening relationship with God / awareness of God’s presence (21%)

- “Greater intimacy and the reality of Christ’s presence.”
- “I want to know God more.”
- “Constant communion with Jesus.”
- “Awareness of God’s presence, more than surface intercessions.”

PreQ8

PreQ8 asked, “Do you regularly reflect or meditate on Scripture (as opposed to study) ? ___Yes ___No. If Yes, please describe.” The responses to this question are as follows:

“Yes”: 14 participants (37%)

“No”: 24 participants (63%)

Representative responses from those who answered “yes” are included below:

- “In my work in Scripture memorization and review I spend considerable time meditating on the passages before me, often to the detriment of my memorization.”
- “I find study of the Scriptures provides the basis for reflection. Often new insights come to me during the day or even at night based on what I have been studying.”
- “Precisely using pray-as-you-go and other Scripture devotions.”
- “Right now I am going through the Chronological Bible.”
- “I do a daily Bible reading. I use Bible Gateway through the Bible in a year format.”
- “I read the readings for the day in *Magnificat* and then try to go to Mass a couple times a week. Or I listen to the Mass with the readings on the radio and

read the meditation of the day and then think on what was said in both the readings and the sermon.”

- “I read it and think about it and listen for God to teach me through it. I pray before I read. I ask to hear the Holy Spirit speaking to me.”

PreQ9

PreQ9: Do you regularly use Scripture when you pray? ____Yes ____No. If Yes,

how? The responses to this question are as follows:

“Yes”: 16 participants (42%)

“No”: 22 participants (58%)

Representative responses from those who use Scripture are included below:

- “I read a bit from Upper Room and then pray using (missionary) prayer letters.”
- “I use what I’ve heard and read in the readings as a direction (like a phrase) to pray for myself and loved ones, our priest, bishop and pope and for our government.”
- “I speak the scripture over my family. I tell God what his word says.”
- “When it is appropriate. I have mixed feelings about reminding God of his promises.”
- “Whatever has stood out to me in our daily Bible reading I try to pray back to God and into my life.”
- “I often claim promises in Scripture and pray the truths for my requests and for others.”
- “I usually read a Psalm then meditate on it as I pray.”
- “I read a brief passage over and over to make sure I’ve heard it all and think about what stands out to me and why—then I talk to God about it.”

Summary of Pre-Project Survey Results

The word most commonly used by the participants to describe their current spiritual life was “growing.” A majority of participants reported some degree of growth, ranging from significant to slow or nearly indiscernible. Many of these acknowledged that there was a need for ongoing growth no matter what level of spiritual maturity had been reached. A significant number (18%) reported that they were stalled or plateaued in their spiritual lives, and most of these mentioned a desire for more or a hunger to grow.

A large majority of the respondents believed they had experienced some significant spiritual growth in the last three years. The percentage of participants who stated in PreQ1 that they were stalled in their growth (18%) corresponds approximately to the percentage in PreQ2 reporting no significant growth in the last three years (21%). This consistency indicates that most that are stalled have been so for quite some time and are aware of that fact. While 79% of all participants reported growth, only 13% indicated that their growth had taken place in the area of prayer. Intercessory prayer was mentioned by 5% of the participants. If these two answers are combined since they both have to do with prayer, then a possible total of 18% report growth in prayer. One participant reported growth in intimacy with God (3%). These two categories—prayer and intimacy with God—have the most in common with *lectio divina*. It is interesting to note the low frequency with which they are reported even in this group of participants, which includes a large number (84%) who have been Christians for more than twenty years. It was expected that there would be a much higher number reporting growth in these areas.

In PreQ3, the majority of the participants reported some degree of dissatisfaction with their spiritual life. Of the fourteen participants who were satisfied, all but three

mentioned that, in spite of some degree of satisfaction, there was room for growth or that they desired to grow more. Thus it should be noted that, since the results from this question were separated into groups based on the participants' use of the word "satisfied," most of those who said they were satisfied could also have been put into the "not very satisfied" category. In retrospect, it might have been better to provide a scale for this question (except for the value of the comments received in response to in the interview-type questions). Nevertheless, it is significant that a majority of respondents reported that they were not satisfied with their current spiritual lives. The responses to this question correspond to the answers to PreQ4 regarding desire to grow spiritually. All of the participants indicated some degree of desire to grow. Therefore, everyone, whether currently satisfied or not, reported that they wanted to grow and change.

Communicating with God was the dominant theme that emerged from 95% of the participants' definition of prayer in PreQ5. All but two participants included words such as "two-way communication," "dialogue" and "speaking and listening," in their description. Of the thirty-six participants who defined prayer as communication with God, 79% explicitly mentioned *listening* as part of prayer. The second most common theme was that of giving thanks and praise to God, mentioned by 26% of the participants. A third theme, found in 21% of the responses, was that of relationship or friendship with God. It is interesting to note that almost all of the respondents believe that prayer consists of communication with God and that almost all would include dialogue or a two-way component in their description of prayer.

It is evident, from comparing the responses to PreQ5 and PreQ6, that there is a significant difference between theory and practice in the prayer lives of the participants.

In PreQ5 a large majority (79%) of participants defined prayer as two-way communication that involved listening. However, in PreQ6, when describing what actually took place in their own prayer life, only eleven participants (30%) said that listening is actually a part of their prayer time. Twenty-six (70%) stated that they either “talk” or “mostly talk.” Therefore it seems that while most participants believe that prayer involves a conversation with God and that listening is important, their actual prayer time consists mostly of a one-way conversation with them doing the talking.

In PreQ7, 50% of the respondents indicated that they would like to grow in the area of focus, discipline and consistency in prayer. They wanted to be able to pray more and to be less distracted. A significant number (37%) indicated a desire to grow in the area of listening to God in prayer. This response shows that the participants are aware that listening should be a part of their prayer, even if they do not actually do it.

When answering PreQ8 and PreQ9, 63% of the respondents reported that they do not regularly meditate or reflect on Scripture, and 58% stated that they do not use Scripture when they pray. For the purpose of this thesis-project, two-way communication with God is a key factor in linking listening and *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina*, in its four stages, involves both speaking and listening on the part of God and the pray-er. Because such a large number of the participants believe that listening as well as talking is a vital part of prayer, it might be expected that many would use Scripture in their prayer since it is God’s primary means of speaking to his people. The data revealed that this is not necessarily true.

Post-Project Survey Results

Thirty-eight of the thirty-nine participants submitted completed post-project survey forms at the end of the project. This represents an unusually high return rate of 98 percent. Each question is presented in the order it is found on the post-project survey form (see Appendix I), followed by a descriptive analysis of the results and representatives of the participants' responses.³ Each post-project survey question is hereafter referred to as PostQ1, PostQ2, etc. Due to the qualitative nature of the data collected, special attention was given to identifying general themes that emerged in the data from a particular question. Representative participants' comments were grouped into similar categories to illustrate the trends and subjects that arose.

PostQ1

PostQ1 asked, "How has your definition of prayer changed (if at all) as a result of participating in this study?" When asked to explain how their definition of prayer had changed, thirty participants (81%) indicated that their definition had not changed while seven (19%) stated that it had changed. One participant did not answer the question. Of the thirty participants whose definition had not changed, only four replied "no" with no further explanation. The remaining twenty-six added qualifications that indicated that, while their definition had not changed, their *practice* of prayer *had* changed as a result of their participation. Select representative responses from these twenty-six are included below:

- "I don't think my definition has changed but my practice and experience has."

³ All responses are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011. See Appendix I for a more complete listing of representative responses.

- “I feel like I knew about prayer but this emphasis on humbly reading scripture and making room for God, not just reading but really waiting for God to speak through scripture and to me, being still and listening—that has taken some patience for me, something that is not usually my nature.”
- “No, but the study helped me focus more. Previously my prayers were ‘to’ God and not so much ‘with’ God. This study helped me prepare more for dialogue with God.”
- “It hasn’t really changed, but was enhanced by addition of Scripture. My only exposure to Scripture was Mass, even daily Mass, but I never meditated on it. This was surprisingly a very effective way of communicating more deeply with God and getting a response and direction.”
- “My definition hasn’t changed but I was more convinced of the power and glory of meditative scripture prayer.”

Of those seven participants who reported a change in their definition of prayer, listening to God was the most frequently mentioned theme. Representative responses of this theme are included below:

- “Spending more time asking questions of God and listening for his answer. Praying more over the Scripture I read and asking for help in application to my life.”
- “Rather than thinking of prayer as going through a list or menu of things to talk to God about, I now am encouraged that it is OK to think of prayer as getting to know him more by listening to what insights he wants to give me from his Word.”
- “I very much like the new idea of read, reflect, respond, rest: It takes ‘prayer is a 2-way conversation with God’ more literally than I have in the past! Very good idea.”

PostQ2

PostQ2 asked, “How has your desire to pray changed (if at all) as a result of participating in this study?” When asked about any change in their desire to pray after taking part in the study, two participants (5%) indicated that their desire to pray had remained the same or gave a neutral answer; thirty-five (95%) stated that their desire had

increased and one did not answer the question. Of the thirty-five participants who indicated an increased desire to pray, ten gave no elaboration while twenty-five responded with comments that explained their perceived increased desire. Three main themes emerged from their answers:

Theme 1: Experienced listening to God and hearing him speak.

Theme 2: Experienced deepening intimacy of relationship with God through prayer.

Theme 3: Experienced increased focus and discipline in prayer and ability to pray.

Select representative responses are provided below grouped according to the three primary themes and the percentage of the twenty-five respondents who mentioned them when describing their increased desire to pray. (Some responses contained comments from more than one category.)

Theme 1: Experienced listening to God and hearing him speak. (60%)

- “I love hearing God from his Word. It is powerful hearing him speak to me regularly. I pray that I will continue listening to his Word regularly and not just daily reading. It takes me making the humble act of listening for his response, not just talking to him.”
- “My desire has changed in that I am more intentional and take more time to be still and let God speak to me rather than the one-way prayer I had used to speak to God.”
- “I am really looking forward to praying using the reflective Scripture prayer method because I am learning to hear God more as I rest and listen. It has reignited a flame of passion for me in prayer.”
- “The change has been to pray over the Bible study I do. I see this as enhancing my time in the Word. Rather than seeing the two separate—see them as one. Of seeking understanding and waiting and listening for his answer.”
- “Considering what words in the passage stand out to me has renewed my perspective of prayer to one of peeking to see what God wants to say to me in

his word today. It is a help in breaking me away from my academic approach I'd fallen into."

- "I am much more willing to pray now. I look forward to hearing from God."

Theme 2: Experienced deepening intimacy of relationship with God through prayer and/or increased need to be with God. (32%)

- "My desire has strengthened due to the intimacy it creates every time I spend time with him."
- "I am starting to get up in the middle of the night just to pray and be with him. Powerful reminder of the wonder of this type of prayer."
- "I actually feel I need this time for reflection and really look forward to using prayer more often."
- "My desire to confide in my God is what gets me up in the morning."

Theme 3: Increased focus and discipline in prayer and ability to pray. (36%)

- "I honestly find it difficult to pray sometimes so having a scheduled expectation was good. I guess discipline of resting changed my desire."
- "Instead of saying I want to spend more time with the Lord, I am actually doing it."
- "I definitely feel more motivated to pray. Really is more peaceful than agonizing before the Lord."
- "I changed my time to pray and got more privacy, it would also seem that I have learned more, so I am more excited about instead of focusing on just praying, praying in a more structured way."

PostQ3

PostQ3 asked, "Overall, how would you describe your satisfaction with your own spiritual life today?" PreQ3 and PostQ3 were identical questions. For purposes of comparison, the same two categories of participants used for PreQ3 were also used to analyze the responses to this question:

Category 1: "Satisfied" (The answers in this category ranged from very satisfied to somewhat satisfied but still wanting to grow.)

Category 2: “Not satisfied” (The answers in this category ranged from not satisfied to very dissatisfied.)

Of thirty-six respondents, thirty reported that they were satisfied or satisfied but wanted to grow. Six participants were not satisfied. Two participants did not complete the question. Representative responses are provided below, along with the percentage of respondents in each category:

Category 1: Satisfied (83%)

- “I think I’m more at peace with where I’m at with the Lord. I would usually feel dissatisfied with where I’m at spiritually. Always wanting to do better. Right now I’m mostly satisfied.”
- “This way of praying has helped me a great deal in making God the anchor of my life, but there is so much more.”
- “Better in that I’ve had intentional time in which I’m only focusing on God—compared to snippets throughout a day.”
- “I am very satisfied. I find that I want to go to confession more and find more ways to be a better witness.”
- “I believe my spiritual life, though sometimes still shaky, is on the road to recovery. I love reading the Bible...not something I could say a few months ago.”
- “I’m never wholly satisfied, but am placing more importance on it than I have for many years.”

Category 2: Not Satisfied (17%)

- “I’m not too satisfied.”
- “Still yearning for a deeper walk, a deeper love with God.”
- “I am not satisfied by how easily I become distracted by life and lose sight of Him. I want to dwell, or rest, in him more continuously.”

PostQ4

PostQ4 asked, “Do you think that the use of Scripture-based reflective prayer has helped you to grow spiritually over the course of the last 6 weeks? Why or why not?” Of the thirty-eight responses, two (5%) were implicitly positive but inconclusive regarding spiritual growth occurring as a result of the study. The two inconclusive comments are listed below:

- “There is always power in His Word for it never changes and it is always the truth.”
- “It challenged me to explore why I believe and search the Scriptures as in Acts 17:11.”

The thirty-six remaining respondents (95%) explicitly stated that they had experienced spiritual growth as a result of their participation. Every participant included at least one reason why *lectio divina* had helped them grow. (Two respondents referred to the weekly response sheet where they had already written their answers to this question.) The reasons can be grouped into four general categories:

Reason 1: Because of using Scripture as a basis for reflection and prayer.

Reason 2: Because of listening to God or being quiet before God and hearing God speak.

Reason 3: Because of staying focused and/or being more disciplined in prayer

Reason 4: Because of experiencing a deeper connection with God in prayer and/or deeper relationship with God and awareness of his presence.

A select representative sampling of the affirmative responses grouped according to category is included below along with the percentage of the thirty-six participants who

mentioned them.⁴ (Some participants' answers contained reasons from more than one category.)

Reason 1: Because of using Scripture as a basis for reflection and prayer. (50%)

- "I believe using this tool is an amazing way to use Scripture in everyday life and to truly just absorb the knowledge and love Christ has for you. I feel a deeper connection to Christ through prayer."
- "Yes, it has helped me to be more intentional in thinking through a passage and then to use it as a means of communication with God."
- "Yes, it's increased my confidence in the fact that God tells me things in his Word—for me, particularly."
- "I seem to do a lot, daily Mass, Adoration, Rosary, and Divine Mercy Chaplet, but sometimes I need something more. While all these are good prayers, the best prayers, *lectio divina* because it combines Scripture and contemplation, brings a new depth and richness to my relationship with God. It has added to the quality of my prayer life."

Reason 2: Because of listening to God or being quiet before God and hearing God speak. (50%)

- "Yes; I needed to practice what I believed; I needed to not just seek understanding at a deeper level but listen for God to speak; Listening is a habit I need to develop more and more."
- "Yes, it has helped my growth. First, it has given me structure and discipline. Second, it has taught me how to pray in quiet and listen to the Lord. Prior to this study, I spent very little time in prayer."
- "Yes, it has helped me to practice some spiritual disciplines that I have not practiced much in the past. I have spent more time in silence before God, more time meditating/reflecting on God's character. More time resting in him and journaling, writing my prayers to God. I have an increased desire to seek him and find time to spend with him."
- "Yes! He is patiently waiting for me to talk with him, not at him."
- "Yes, it's increased my confidence in the fact that God tells me things in his Word—for me, particularly."

⁴ See Appendix L for a more complete listing of representative responses.

Reason 3: Because of staying focused and/or being more disciplined in prayer.
(44%)

- “Yes, having Scripture as an anchor for reflection is very helpful in keeping my wandering mind more focused.”
- “Yes, it has helped my growth. First, it has given me structure and discipline. Second, it has taught me how to pray in quiet and listen to the Lord. Prior to this study, I spent very little time in prayer.”
- “I feel it has helped me grow. It has helped bring the focus I was lacking. I had got caught up in reading the Bible just like story. This helped me.”
- “This study has helped me get started in the morning. This reflective prayer has been both helpful in revealing God’s Word more clearly and it has helped in growing my spirit and my soul. I will continue to use this guide as a guide to continue from this point on. It has helped me tremendously.”
- “It has definitely helped. Writing down phrases has been especially helpful. I’m a visual learner and writing helps to imprint the ideas on my brain, and then I have those words in front of me as I reflect on them.”

Reason 4: Because of experiencing a deeper connection with God in prayer
and/or deeper relationship with God and awareness of his presence.
(38%)

- “Yes because I felt my spirit being in communication with God as well as mentally.”
- “Yes! This has reaffirmed to me what I have known but neglected to grasp—the great desire of God to be with us.”
- “Yes I do. It has expanded my view of prayer greatly. My tendency was to think of real prayer as dry and boring and full of endless petitions—the stereotypical prayer meeting. Now I see prayer as refreshing and more alive, a connection with God.”
- “Yes, I’ve started to get up and spend time solely with him—no distractions of phone, computer. Thank you, 1000x Kathy!”
- “Yes, because through His Word I’ve gotten closer to Him. Multiple times a week I’ve encountered him tangibly.”

PostQ5

PostQ5 asked, “How would you evaluate the contents and effectiveness of the Prayer Guide?” Of thirty-eight participants, thirty-six answered this question. One person referred to the “summary sheets” and one gave no response. Select representative responses to this question are included below and are grouped together according to positive feedback and negative feedback:⁵

Negative Feedback

- “I believe its intentions are good but I am not sure that I can find Biblical support for ‘hearing God speak today’ other than by dwelling on his revealed Word, the Bible.”⁶
- “Overall, it was very good and well laid out. I thought some of the Scripture choices were pretty basic and repetitious, but I expect you planned it that way.”
- “I thought the first three sections⁷ were very helpful in analyzing the passage and applying to my life and praying back to God. I wasn’t quite sure what to do with the last one.⁸ It seemed to me to be a bit anticlimactic. I think it is a good means not to rush off to what is next on my agenda but its practicality escapes me. Maybe it is intended to give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to apply what has been learned to my life. And that is good!”

Positive Feedback

- “Very effective, simple, easy to understand and do—continuity helped develop different prayer patterns The Scripture based Reflect prayer card I used every day, very good reminder, will keep it up.”
- “The prayer guide is excellent. It started out with favorite OT and NT passages but helped me identify with our Lord in these passages in a new and

⁵ See Appendix M for a more complete listing of representative responses.

⁶ This comment indicates that there was a misunderstanding about what it means for God to speak, since *lectio divina* is, in fact, “dwelling on God’s revealed Word.”

⁷ The participant is referring to the first three steps of *lectio divina*—read, meditate (or reflect), and pray (or respond).

⁸ The participant is referring to the fourth step of *lectio divina*—contemplate (or rest).

deeper way. The passages in the guide helped me realize in a new way how great God's love is for me and led me to a deeper desire to seek him with my whole heart."

- "I was pleased with the format. The process of reading the passage several times and picking out key word and phrases helped me really contemplate the message. The process of focusing on God's Word and asking God to provide insight and direction caused me to have a more enlightened prayer experience."
- "I love that small card with the steps of *lectio divina*. Sometimes I feel stuck and can refer back to that sheet."
- "I think the contents were just right in quality and size. It was small enough so that it was not intimidating but sure packs a punch in quality. Doing these in succession also made it effective because I learned more and more how to do it each time."
- "The prayer guide is easy to use with any Scripture so I can continue to use it daily."

PostQ6

PostQ6 asked, "Do you intend to pursue this kind of prayer in the future? ___ Yes ___ No. Why or why not?" All but one participant answered this question. The results are as follows:

"Yes": 36 participants (97%)

"No": 1 participant (3%)

Four main categories emerged from the reasons given for intending to pursue *lectio divina* in the future:

- Reason 1: Because it strengthened relationship/intimacy with God and increased enjoyment of prayer and awareness of God's presence.
- Reason 2: Because it increased the ability to listen to God and have two-way communication with him and know how to pray.
- Reason 3: Because it enhanced the reading/understanding of Scripture and links Scripture with prayer.

Reason 4: Because it provided focus and discipline for prayer.

Representative answers are provided below and grouped according to the four reasons along with the percentage of the thirty-six respondents who mentioned that reason (some responses contain more than one reason):

Reason 1: Because it strengthened relationship/intimacy with God and increased enjoyment of prayer and awareness of God's presence. (38%)

- "Yes, I think it will be beneficial to use with my regular means of study and prayer. In this way it will deepen my walk with God."
- "Yes...it feels more like a healthy relationship than the petition laden prayers I usually do."
- "Yes, because I desire increased intimacy with God for his glory."
- "Yes because it can take you into the very presence of God."
- "Yes, I love how *lectio divina* guides you into deeper prayer."
- "Yes, I realized I have been doing it my whole life, and I really enjoy it."

Reason 2: Because it increased the ability to listen to God and have two-way communication with him. (27%)

- "Yes, it has taught me a new and very effective way of listening to God and to take purposeful time with him. I have asked that God teach me true humility. The act of humbly listening has been a big part of this answered prayer"
- "Yes, I've underlined on the card you provided of the 4 steps the part that says to take time to listen to what he is saying personally to me. I need that reminder."
- "Yes, strengthened my ability to talk to and listen to God."
- "Yes, to maintain the discipline and meaning for spending time with and listening to Scripture."

Reason 3: Because it enhanced the reading/understanding of Scripture and links Scripture with prayer. (25%)

- "It helps me understand Scripture more and I feel like I can get better direction from God for my life. It helps me know more about how to pray."

- “Yes, to maintain the discipline and meaning for spending time with and listening to Scripture. To let Scripture guide me in prayer.”
- “It works well for me to have Scripture as the jumping off point.”
- “Scripture becomes more alive and relevant.”
- “It links prayer and Bible study at every word.”

Reason 4: Because it provided focus and discipline for prayer. (19%)

- “It provides a focal point, one directed toward the Lord.”
- “Yes, it helps me focus my attention on God more effectively. I feel his presence faster which in the end, gives me more time with him.”
- “It also fits my learning style and personality to write my thoughts. Also writing helps me to take time to think more carefully and fully.”
- “It focuses prayer on God and his purposes not on me and my goals.”
- “Yes, to maintain the discipline and meaning for spending time with and listening to Scripture.”

PostQ7

PostQ7 asked, “How could the materials used in this study be improved?” Select suggestions for improvement to the study are all included below (some participants offered no suggestions):⁹

- “Maybe to explain further the intent and use of step 4. Some of us over-practical sorts may find it difficult to use as is. Thanks for the great study and opportunity to learn another way to approach the scriptures and prayer.”
- “For this initial study, the contents were fine. The method worked well for me and it very much achieved its purpose. I can see going through a whole book of the Bible in this fashion. This structure works very well and I will use this method to help in my spiritual growth.”

⁹ See Appendix N for a complete listing of representative responses.

- “If it were to be made into a small booklet, it might be good to pair each verse with a beautiful piece of artwork.”
- “None. I think you should print this out as a study guide for *lectio divina* and sell it as a booklet. The passages were well ordered and seemed to lead the reader through various themes to the ultimate goal—trust in God, surrender to him. This was very well done! Don’t limit this to beginners. It is for everyone.”

Summary of Post-Project Survey Results

Before the thesis-project began, it was assumed that many participants would change their definition of prayer as a result of their participation in the project. But, when asked in PostQ1 to explain how their definition of prayer had changed, thirty participants (81%) indicated that their definition had *not* changed while only seven (19%) stated that it had changed. A close examination of PreQ5 and PostQ1 revealed an unexpected result. PreQ5 revealed that the majority (95%) already had a perception of prayer that included two-way communication with God—both listening and talking. However, PostQ1 revealed that most did not regularly practice what they believed about prayer. This was evidenced by the fact that although thirty participants said their definition of prayer had not changed, twenty-six of them added explanations to their answer that showed that their *practice* of prayer *had* changed and now included some of the qualities of prayer that were mentioned in their initial definition. As a result of the study, many became aware of the discrepancy between belief and practice and began to incorporate listening again (or for the first time) into their prayer life. So in the end, if these twenty-six are added to the seven whose definition and practice *had* changed, a total of thirty-three (89%) of the participants experienced some change in their definition and practice of prayer.

From the results of PostQ2 it was evident that most (95%) of the respondents had experienced some degree of increased desire to pray as a result of their participation. None experienced a decreased desire. The twenty-five comments from the majority about how their desire had changed revealed one primary reason and two secondary reasons. The primary reason was that, because they had taken time to listen, they had experienced hearing from God. Actually experiencing prayer as a two-way communication served to ignite their desire to pray. The secondary reasons for increased desire were that the participants, through practicing *lectio divina*, had experienced a strengthened relationship with God and increased focus and discipline in prayer and ability to pray.

When asked in PreQ3 to describe their satisfaction with their current spiritual life, 39% reported being satisfied while 61% were dissatisfied. After the study was over, the same question was asked in PostQ3 and this time 83% of the participants reported being satisfied and 17% were dissatisfied. These results are summarized in Figure 5:1.

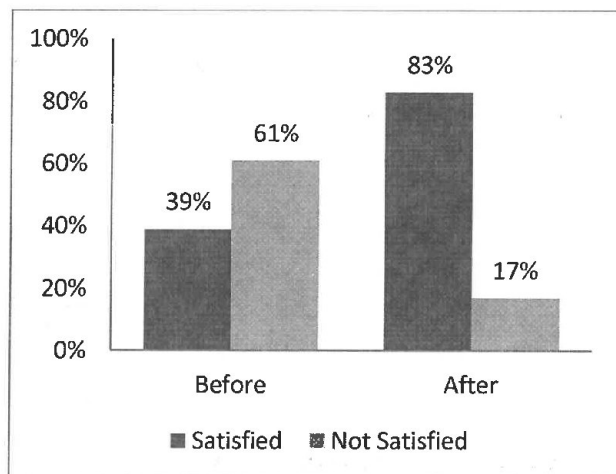


Figure 5:1 Satisfaction with Spiritual Life.

One factor that may have influenced the results of this rather subjective question is the fact that many participants seem to have been hesitant to say that they were satisfied

without qualifying their answer. This is evidenced by the number of explanations about their satisfaction that were included in the respondents' answers to PreQ3 and PostQ3. I suspect that most of the participants felt if they were to say they were satisfied, it would imply that they had no need to grow more or improve in their Christian life. This may have resulted in the need to state that there was room for improvement. Because of this, there is a blurred distinction between those who are somewhat satisfied and those who are somewhat dissatisfied. Perhaps a scale would have been a better measuring instrument for this particular question. Nevertheless, the comparison between the comments given in PreQ3 and PostQ3 reveals that there was a significant improvement in the participants' perceptions of their spiritual lives. If a scale were to be used, it would still be advisable to elicit comments as well.

The single most important question for the purposes of this research was PostQ4. This question was designed to determine whether or not the participants perceived any spiritual growth in their lives after using *lectio divina* for six weeks. The question was placed mid-way through the survey form so as to not alert the respondents to its significance in the project. The highly positive response (95% with 5% inconclusive) was unanticipated but consistent with the results from the other questions in the survey. The positive response rate to this question also demonstrates that there was no difference between Protestant/Catholic, male/female or age grouping.¹⁰ Respondents gave four categories of reasons for why they believed that using *lectio divina* had resulted in their spiritual growth:

Reason 1: Because of using Scripture as a basis for reflection and prayer. (50%)

¹⁰ The two inconclusive responses came from one Protestant male age 60+ and one Protestant female age 41-60.

Reason 2: Because of listening to God or being quiet before God and hearing God speak. (50%)

Reason 3: Because of staying focused and/or being more disciplined in prayer (44%)

Reason 4: Because of experiencing a deeper connection with God in prayer and/or deeper relationship with God and awareness of his presence. (38%)

These four categories of reasons corresponded to the three categories of desired growth from PreQ7. Please see Figure 5:2 for a side-by-side comparison.

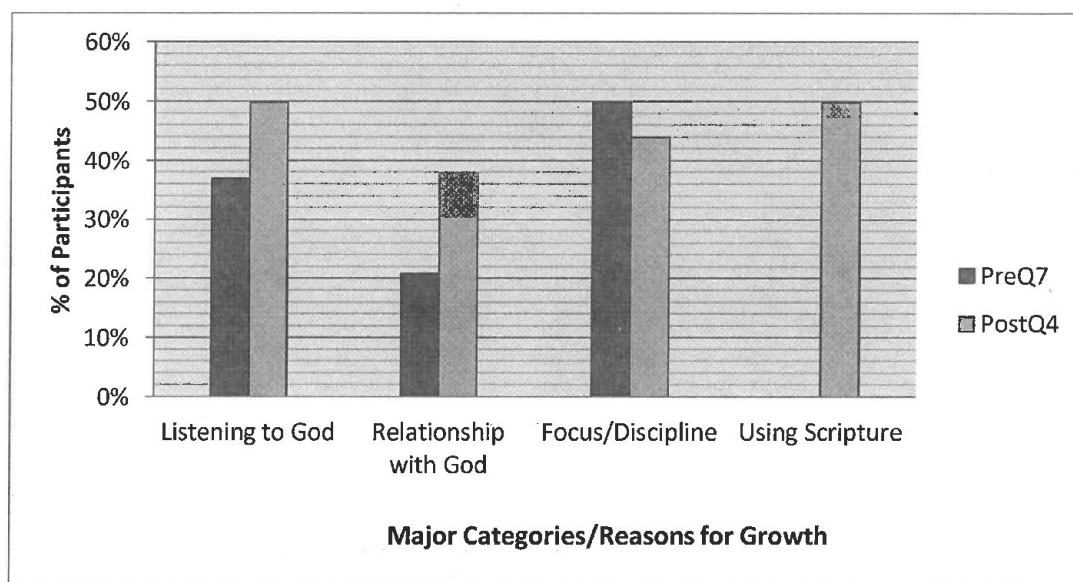


Figure 5:2 Major Reasons for Spiritual Growth

- PreQ7: What aspects of your prayer life would you like to change or grow in?
- PostQ4: Why do you think that the use of Scripture-based reflective prayer has helped you to grow spiritually over the course of the last 6 weeks?

This comparison shows that three of the reasons the participants gave for their spiritual growth during the study corresponded to the same areas in which they expressed a desire to grow before the study began. Using Scripture in prayer was not mentioned as a desired growth area in PreQ7. It was, however, listed as one of the primary reasons that

respondents believed that they grew spiritually over the course of the study. This is consistent with the other findings that concluded that a majority did not in fact use Scripture in their own prayer time. Here, it can be seen that when they did use Scripture, spiritual growth took place. The fact that learning to incorporate Scripture into their prayer lives was a major reason that participants experienced spiritual growth while doing *lectio divina* is very significant. It should help allay the fears of those who are concerned that *lectio divina* would take focus away from Scripture to subjective, extra-biblical thoughts and feelings.

The negative feedback from PostQ5 regarding the contents and effectiveness of the prayer guide was helpful. That feedback will be considered later in this chapter under suggestions for improvement. One person forgot that there was introductory material in the front of the guide and wished that they had remembered it. Another participant would have preferred to use less familiar verses but realized that the ones in the prayer guide had been chosen for a reason. It is true that familiar passages were chosen for several reasons. It was hoped that the participants would be familiar with the context of the short passages and therefore not have the opportunity for out of context interpretations. (This addresses one respondent's concern that the prayer guide was taking verses out of context.) Also, by using well known passages, it enabled the participants to concentrate their efforts on learning how to use *lectio divina* rather than feeling as if they needed to do Bible study on the passage before they could begin. One person indicated that they had trouble with the "Rest" step. This will be addressed later with similar results from the weekly response sheets.

The positive feedback from PostQ5 gave insight into what was successful about the prayer guide. Many appreciated the simplicity and organization of the materials as well as the choice of Scripture passages. Some Protestants liked the four “R”s and the explanations that went along with them as well as having them reinforced with the quick reference card. Several mentioned that they appreciated being asked to slow down and read the passages several times. Many also thought it was helpful and effective to repeat the process many times over the course of the six weeks because it enabled them to learn the steps of *lectio divina* and to make it a habit. Interestingly, some realized that they had been doing something very similar already in their prayer time.

PostQ6 was also an important indicator of the success of using *lectio divina* to promote spiritual growth. All the participants, except for one, stated that they intended to continue the practice in the future. When to give an explanation of why they would want to continue, they gave reasons that could be grouped according to the following themes:

Theme 1: Because it strengthened relationship/intimacy with God and increased enjoyment of prayer and awareness of God’s presence.

Theme 2: Because it increased the ability to listen to God and have two-way communication with him and know how to pray.

Theme 3: Because it enhanced the reading/understanding of Scripture and links Scripture with prayer.

Theme 4: Because it provided focus and discipline for prayer.

These four themes corresponded to the three categories of desired growth from PreQ7, the three themes from PostQ2 and the four themes from PostQ4. Please see Figure 5:2 for a side-by-side comparison.

The responses to PostQ7 provided some suggestions from the participants on how to improve the study. Several mentioned the desire to do *lectio divina* on a longer passage

such as a whole chapter or book of the Bible. Most commented that for an introductory experience that the verses chosen were appropriate. A few participants would have liked to see more explanation of *lectio divina* at the beginning, especially of the fourth stage. These suggestions are considered later in the suggestions for future study.

Weekly Response Sheets Results

The participants were asked to evaluate their prayer experience at the end of each week on a weekly response sheet. They were given the following questions to guide their responses:

- How would you describe your overall experience of prayer this week?
- How did you experience God speaking to you?
- How did you notice God's presence with you?
- Why did you enjoy or not enjoy your prayer time this week?
- What was the best thing about using Reflective Scripture-based Prayer as a guide for your time with God?
- Did you have any difficulties?

Some respondents answered all the questions; others picked one or two. The responses varied from one sentence in length to large paragraphs. These journal-type responses revealed the same kinds of results as the post-project surveys but gave opportunity for more personal detail and individualized responses. The four major themes from PostQ4 (using Scripture as a basis for prayer; listening to God; focus and discipline in prayer; relationship with God) appear throughout the responses and many of the answers contain

multiple themes. A select representative group of answers from each week is provided below:¹¹

Comments from Week One

- “I felt the time spent in this type of prayer was very personalized this week, God met me right where I was. God spoke through different words and phrases and through quiet time and resting.”
- “I separate Bible study and prayer - the first is analytical, cerebral. Prayer is the old 5 steps. I use prayer letters and Operation World. I haven’t been this introspective in ages. I need this.”
- “My experience overall this week of prayer was very much needed and I feel it is helping me have a deeper connection with the Lord. I had forgotten what an amazing experience it is to have him speak to you if you would just allow yourself to listen to him. I went to a quiet room each day and would pray for his presence before I began the readings and I could feel his presence before me, helping me really absorb the meaning of the scriptures. Lectio divina is a great tool for me because it helps me to focus more on what the Scripture is saying to me and how I can use it in everyday life.”
- “I feel the Lord’s pleasure and presence when I quiet myself and stop doing all the talking I enjoyed just chewing each word in the Scriptures given. There were invitations, commandments, promises, encouragement, and intimacy. It was refreshing, challenging, encouraging, and sobering. Best: always seeing who God is his great love for me, prodding me to be more like him. He loves our time together.”
- “What I’ve loved about *lectio divina* is that I can LISTEN to God and not just talk to him and ask for things. There is something very comforting about reading Scripture in this way and fun. There is something deep in me that is touched and also challenged by Scripture. It is an experience like being fed and nourished.”

Comments from Week Two

- “It was a powerful experience of God’s extravagant love. I haven’t ever read Scripture over again- several times before. Amazing what you miss the first time around, then the second and third.”

¹¹ All responses are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011. See Appendix M for a more complete listing of representative responses.

- “The best thing about using lectio has been spending time really listening to God after I ask him to help me understand the passage. As I ponder God’s Word it seems to become part of my being, sinking deep into my heart and soul and mind.”
- “I found as I meditated on these passages that it made me even more desirous of deepening my relationship with Him and to follow Him no matter what the cost. As I meditated on these passages prayer was a natural response.”
- “It is becoming easier to put myself aside and wait for God. This form of prayer makes it easier to feel close to God. It helps to keep me focused. The Scripture leads me to pray on a deeper level than the usual petition and thanksgiving.”
- “I once again found myself drawn into deeper communion and deeper experience of God’s presence and God’s love through these times of prayer and meditation. I believe that prayer is becoming more of a default behavior for me as I encounter the circumstances of each day. I enjoyed my prayer time because it gave me time apart to set aside circumstances and concerns and enjoy my relationship with God. The best thing about Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is that it is well planned and laid out and draws me in quickly to commune with God.”
- “I’ve been waking up at 5am and I realized God is waking me up to pray. Using Scripture as a basis for prayer keeps me from making prayer time a to-do list for God. I can focus on Him rather than what he can do for me.”

Comments from Week Three

- “I noticed his presence by sensing his embrace and acceptance as I internalized the truth of what phrases he pointed out. The best thing was his bringing those truths to mind as I interacted during the day. I enjoyed my prayer time because God met me at my need.”
- “It was such a relief to be able to pray in such a way that it is all about God. And no matter what issues I’m facing, the answer to it all is God! The best thing about it this week is how it colored so much else in my life. It wasn’t so much about interesting insights into the verses, but how it changed other things in my life.”
- “I am continuing to experience God’s love and his presence more deeply than I have for over a year. Reflective Scripture-based Prayer consistently draws me to a greater depth of relationship, to a more intimate relationship with God.”

- “His presence is often so real I don’t want to leave. This has changed my whole being! I just rested, really rested in Him.”
- “I lived in the passages all day. The Lord gave me prayers using the very words that jumped out. The hard circumstances were somehow filled with a peace and a power due to the constant all day meditating on the Scriptures even when I had no time to open my Bible. The Lord carried me through with joy and peace.”
- “I think that this week I began to realize how much I miss closeness with God. I do long for him and I feel him drawing me closer. Scripture came to mind all during the week. I am also more aware of God’s presence.”

Comments from Week Four

- “Amazing how the passages were very familiar yet God spoke to me clearly each day: revealing new truths I had not thought about or considered. I was dumbfounded and amazed by how God revealed himself—how I prayed on a new level.”
- “I need this desperately because I am always in such a rush! I am still impatient— always in a hurry to move on to something else. However, when I do relax and reflect on these readings, I love it—it’s like an oasis in troubled waters. God’s Word calms me down and reminds me of how I should be living. I still resist Him in certain areas.”
- “I continue to find these times of prayer drawing me into a more intimate relationship with God and find I am increasingly aware of his presence through the day. My prayer time was like daily bread, sustaining in midst of chaos.”
- “Discernment was easier this week. God’s words and my ability to pray flowed easily. I really felt in tune with God as the Scriptures really seemed to be a real catalyst to my prayer.”
- “I felt the Lord’s presence in new ways by just the power of one phrase or one word. The words gave me life—fresh guidance from the Lord. The whole exercise was almost all done in rest. Sweet! Because I’d stopped panicking and rushing and let the Lord lead.”
- “The more I read the Word and pray, the more I want to. When I first began this prayer guide, I was reading and learning but I wasn’t hearing God. I heard him this week. Using Scripture as a basis for prayer captures my heart and mind.”

Comments from Week Five

- “My experience of prayer was more one of awe and pleasure as I realized that the Lord was showing me things I would never think to search for. Using the guide provides much needed focus.”
- “Better than last week! This week, there is more of a deliberateness and fervency of praying his Word, asking the Lord to help me in what he sees that I need. The Lord opens my eyes to Scriptures I’ve read over and over, but there are those times when for that day it is bread and life.”
- “This study guide has been helpful in that it gives me structure and keeps me focused and keeps my mind from wandering. By the time I am finished I can feel his love more abundantly and I feel refreshed.”
- “Another deepening realization reinforced by this study is prayer is far more than communication—it is communion. My whole being is involved in communion with God - not just my intellect through words. Prayer is an attitude of my heart—an openness to God.
- “The Lord impressed on me the priority of knowing him. Genuinely pursue knowing and understanding and appreciating the depths of his heart is the goal of prayer. Not reciting a wish list to a celestial Santa.”
- “Praying the Scripture every day has made prayer more intimate and more focused on my relationship with God.”

Comments from Week Six

- “This week I felt I rested more—that this way of praying through Scripture was becoming more than an exercise, that God was using it to slow me down so I would listen to him. The best thing about using Scripture-based Reflective Prayer is that it is helping me to slow down to rest to wait upon the Lord during my time with him.”
- “When using the guide I experience a back and forth conversation more than when I don’t use it. This two-way conversation brings about an intimate connection to what the days held and my response and approach to it. I enjoyed how the Lord showed me things I would not have begun to search for. I had difficulty in that I knew this was the last week and I didn’t want it to end. Having said this, I know it won’t end—that I’ll use this method as I continue in prayer.”
- “Prayer has been a more consistent part of my daily experience. I find myself turning to prayer throughout the day, often returning to the thoughts and Scriptures of the focused morning prayer time. I find God speaking to me as I

reflect respond and rest. I enjoyed my prayer time because it continues to nurture my intimacy with God.”

- “I experienced an increased desire for prayer. I started to have prayer times that were a bit less formal and more personal. I’ve started reading my Bible a lot more carefully and slowly. I also decide to start a blog so I can keep a record of what I read and my thoughts on these verses.”
- “I finally understand the importance of reading Scripture frequently. I understand now how it starts from being just words, to internalizing it, and then how it changes us to respond in some way. I thought I understood it when it was explained but really you have to do it repeatedly in this order to really experience it. I got it! I’ve done it, I know how to do it, go through it and now I can continue building my faith on Scripture. Wow. this was the one piece that was missing in my prayer life.”

Difficulties

As a part of their weekly evaluation, participants were asked to note any difficulties they experienced in using *lectio divina*. Some of the difficulties mentioned had to do with prayer in general, such as time constraints. Other comments were more specific to *lectio divina* such as being quiet and slowing down, and the fourth stage of *lectio divina*—resting (contemplation). Representative responses are included below:¹²

- “Slowing down and resting and listening to God.”
- “I am still getting used to this way of prayer—to be still and listen for God. I’m looking forward to developing in this reflective prayer. The hard thing for me to overcome is putting my own agenda in the way.”
- “Day 2 not as dramatic an awareness of God, wasn’t good at the ‘rest’ bit but felt a sense of hope that rest was a part of the experience.”
- “I find that ‘doing’ the rest part is not something that comes naturally to me and I need to allow more time to actually reach a resting point. I’m finding I really need to be where there are no distractions to have felt I’ve allowed for being reflective and open to God.”

¹² See Appendix P for a more complete selection of responses.

- “My struggle to put a high priority on taking this kind of reflective time continues even though I’m so glad to have taken the time after I’ve done it.”
- “I’m still struggling with the rest part. I need to slow down during that time.”

Summary of Weekly Response Sheets

One unexpected aspect of the responses from the weekly response sheets was the vulnerability with which the participants answered the questions. Many participants related personal experiences of how God had spoken directly into their lives through their prayer times. They were open with their struggles and circumstances and how God was asking them to respond to him. Highly personal comments were redacted from the quotes presented in this thesis-project in order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents. However, the honesty and openness of the responses are still evident. This aspect lends credence to the validity of the results of this study.

Most of the participants’ comments regarding their weekly prayer experience corresponded with the areas of growth reported in the post-project survey results. Other helpful information provided included:

- Fruit of their prayer time spilled over into the rest of the day and into other areas of their life
- Listening to God and discerning his voice in prayer became easier over time
- Experienced increased ability to hear from God more regularly during the day. Had a sense of carrying the Scriptures with them through the day
- God spoke directly to specific areas of need
- Experienced enjoyment of being able to slow down and take time just to be with God
- Felt the Lord’s pleasure and his enjoyment of their time together
- Experienced a deep sense of God’s love for them

- Journaling helped them remember what God said to them
- Felt restored and renewed after prayer time
- Felt fed, nourished and sustained by Scripture
- Enthusiasm for prayer was kindled
- Were affected deeply at a heart-level by what they experienced
- Prayer became less self-centered
- Desired to have even more time for prayer
- Strong awareness of God's presence and leading
- Feelings of peace, love and joy in God's presence
- Comfortableness with silence
- Increased sense of thankfulness
- Enjoyed interceding with prayers from Scripture
- Restored sense of hope in their spiritual lives

It was also noted that, in general, the participants' responses over time became more and more confident. Many who started out hesitantly were, by week six, confidently reporting their experiences and their intention to continue with *lectio divina*. The six weeks of practice and consistent positive experience (even though some had to persevere through difficulties) gave most a fresh enthusiasm for prayer that was reflected in their remarks. The success of *lectio divina* probably had a lot to do with its simplicity. Many remarked on the simplicity of the prayer guide itself. The participants were able to learn the four stages quickly, which gave them enough time to internalize this type of prayer and be able to concentrate on their prayer itself instead of the method.

Each participant's journal-type entries in the weekly response sheets were examined to see if there were any trends in their progress over the course of the six-week study. Overall, every participant reported some degree of improvement from week one to week six in one or more areas.¹³ Most said that it became easier to use *lectio divina* as time went on and that it became more ingrained as a habit. Of particular interest was the trend of increasingly positive growth from week one to week six. Of thirty-eight participants who completed the weekly response sheets, twenty-four (63%) indicated a steady increase in growth with minimal difficulties while fourteen participants (37%) indicated a steady increase but with some difficulty or decline occurring sometime during the middle of the six weeks. Most respondents who experienced a downturn in the middle of the study stated that their difficulty was related to life circumstances, time availability, distractions or motivation. Every person who reported a mid-study decline also stated that within one or two weeks, they noticed an improvement from that point on. Therefore it may be concluded that all of the participants saw some degree of growth in their spiritual lives over the course of using *lectio divina* for six weeks. One implication of this finding is that for one reason or another, people may lose enthusiasm after beginning a new discipline, but if they persevere, it will prove beneficial.

One example of comments from a participant who reported significant increased growth over time with minimal difficulties is included below:¹⁴

Week 1: "This honestly has been a very challenging week (relates personal details about time constraints)...I experienced God speaking to me about slowing down and being quiet and letting Him guide me instead of never resting.... I spoke to God frequently throughout this week, but I hope to set more time aside to

¹³ For more details, see the results from PostQ2 and PostQ4 earlier in this chapter, p. 158 and 161.

¹⁴ All responses are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

be alone with Him this coming week....The Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is encouraging me to STOP and spend time LISTENING to what God wants me to get out of my reading. Journaling helps me remember what He said.”

Week 2: “I am beginning to look forward to this time with God....Too many summer distractions—but I’m not turning on the TV; I’m trying to sit outdoors to do this; and I’m waiting on God more. When I stop thinking, writing, talking, I give God a chance to communicate with me. Sometimes He uses Scripture and sometimes other people, but it’s all good—hearing from Him. I like using the Reflective Scripture-based approach to prayer because it keeps me focused and it seems more productive than just one-way prayer.”

Week 3: “I feel like I’m getting better and better at this. I like having a format for dwelling on God’s words.... I find myself looking forward to stopping other activities and sitting in a quiet place (preferably out in His creation) and reflecting on various scriptures. I like the discipline I am developing....The best thing about this is that it makes me slow down and enjoy talking with my Savior and God.”

Week 4: “I need this desperately because I am always in such a rush! However, when I do relax and reflect on these readings, I love it—it’s like an oasis in troubled waters. God’s Word calms me down and reminds me of how I should be living.”

Week 5: “My overall experience of prayer this week was better....I did this week’s reflective reading and prayer outside again and found I could think more clearly....Using Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is causing me to paraphrase the reading and therefore get more understanding out of it.”

Week 6: “Even better this week. Listening to Him is getting easier.... I am enjoying this more and more. When I pray, God is reminding me of other Scriptures so I’ve been praying them back to Him. I like doing this very much. I can’t wait for the new prayer guide!”

One example of comments from a participant who reported significant increased growth over time but experienced some mid-study difficulties is included below:

Week 1: “Experience was satisfying. It was easy to get into a rhythm or pattern.”

Week 2: “I wrestled with Scripture more—in trying to discern what God is telling me to do with this information and how to apply it.”

Week 3: “I found it difficult to clear my mind and schedule. It seemed that God’s message came early as I read the Scriptures. The writing of key phrases or words is helpful in contemplating the message.”

Week 4: "Discernment was easier this week. God's words and my ability to pray flowed easily. I really felt in tune with God as the Scriptures really seemed to be a real catalyst to my prayer."

Week 5: "The passages really spoke to me this week....Discernment of God's message came easy and I was able to have meaningful prayer with God....(I) felt God's presence more than at any other time in the study."

Week 6: "I enjoyed the study. The aspect of being still and listening for God was very useful and unique to my other studies. The assignment of picking out key words and phrases helped me key in on the message of the Scripture. Over the weeks I found that I took more opportunities to pray and found myself listening more for God's instruction."

Suggestions for Improvement

One concern that existed from the beginning of the thesis-project was that the interaction of the researcher with the participants was not face-to-face. I believe that this did not affect the outcome of the project, due in part to the maturity of the participants and their familiarity with Scripture. In other settings, however, it may be more effective to have a regular group setting for explanations and discussion. A group that meets weekly or bi-weekly over the course of six months or a year would allow the participants to practice what they learn at home and then be able to ask questions and share their experiences. Interaction with fellow participants could serve to encourage the ones who encounter difficulties and provide accountability for continuing the practice of *lectio divina* after the group time is over. It would be beneficial to establish a more lasting practice and habit of prayer than in the six weeks allowed in this project. For research purposes, it would be beneficial to measure the number of participants who are still practicing *lectio divina* several months after the time is over. Because a significant number of participants experienced various difficulties during the six-week period, it might be helpful for there to be some instruction on what to do when encountering

problems with schedule, circumstances or motivation. A longer time would allow for including this kind of information and encouragement.

A group setting would also provide an opportunity to present the history of *lectio divina* and explain the four stages in more detail. Since a number of participants had trouble with the fourth stage of *lectio divina*, group sessions would allow for more explanation of contemplation that could include excerpts and examples from church history and the saints. Two other suggestions, derived from the participants' comments, would be to include instructions to set aside a quiet place with no reminders of the day's work and to propose trying it outdoors. Almost every participant at some point mentioned that they struggled with busyness and distraction so it would be important to address this issue in some detail.

Although minimal concern was expressed, I would say that, in Protestant settings in particular, it is important to give more explanation of the value of *lectio divina* as a prayer method and that it is not intended as a substitute for Bible study and exegesis. In order to alleviate the concern of taking verses out of context, it might be beneficial to provide some brief explanatory notes in the prayer guide to give the context for the verses. Also, doing *lectio divina* on a whole book or longer passage would help ease this concern although it would be important to use only a very short passage for each session.

Conclusions

The overwhelmingly positive response to using *lectio divina* and the fact that 95 percent of the participants reported experiencing spiritual growth is encouraging. Most of the participants already believed that prayer involved communication with God, both listening and talking, but did not practice it. When given the opportunity to use Scripture

in their prayer and to experience listening to God and hearing him speak to them, most were excited and challenged to make *lectio divina* regular part of their spiritual lives. It seemed to give people permission to listen to God through the safe medium of Scripture and to give them the opportunity to realize that he wants to speak to each person individually. I fully expected resistance from the Protestant participants even without the use of the controversial terms *meditation*, *contemplation* and *lectio divina*. However, this was not the case. Furthermore, there was no discernable difference between the responses of the participants in terms of Protestant/Catholic, male/female or age grouping.

One disturbing, though not surprising, fact stood out: there was a major inconsistency between belief and practice in many participants' prayer lives. Since most of the participants had been Christians for more than twenty years and had formed a well-rounded definition of prayer, one would think that their prayer life would reflect their beliefs but, in fact, it did not. The findings of the research done in this thesis-project correspond almost directly with the findings of the initial survey mentioned in Chapter One¹⁵ that was done among members of one local non-denominational evangelical Church. Both surveys revealed that two-way communication in prayer was a high value but, in reality, was not practiced widely. The consistency of these two surveys lends validity to the wider application of this thesis-project. Even though the sample for this project itself was small and many were missionaries, similar conclusions could be drawn from the church group surveyed.

A significant conclusion can be readily made from the results of this study: individuals, whether stalled in their spiritual lives or not, may experience an increase in

¹⁵ See pp. 3-4.

satisfaction with their spiritual lives with the use of *lectio divina* in their prayer time.

They can also experience some degree of spiritual growth after exposure to only six weeks of using *lectio divina*. This speaks well of the practice and suggests that it could be used in the lives of many to bring about a renewed passion for prayer and a deepening of relationship with God.

With our fast-paced society, the tendency of some is to rush through reading Scripture in order to finish a certain amount each day. *Lectio divina* gives the reader permission to slow down and not have to even finish a sentence, much less a whole paragraph or book. Many of the participants found this difficult at the beginning, but after they tried it for several days or a few weeks, their comments indicated an appreciation for being able to slow down and actually savor the Word and ask God to speak to them.

Most participants experienced an increased desire to pray because of taking time to listen to God, to strengthen their relationship with him and to develop stronger prayer habits. Since relationship with God is at the core of *lectio divina* and listening to God is a crucial component, it is not surprising that the participants wanted to pray more. They were actually experiencing prayer as they already believed it should be. It is interesting to note that no one said that the increase in their desire to pray had anything to do with intercessory prayer. For some it seemed to relieve them from the burden of prayer lists and stereotypical prayer meetings and bring them back to prayer as a part of relationship with God. In the end, it did not seem to matter what the participants' initial spiritual states were. Whether they had considered themselves plateaued or not, they indicated that the experience of *lectio divina* was positive and helped them grow.

In Chapter One of this thesis-project, it was noted that many Christians are dissatisfied with their spiritual lives and feel stalled in their growth. *Lectio divina* was introduced as a possible means of assisting believers to grow and deepen in their relationship with God. The spiritual theology of *lectio divina*, along with the body of relevant literature written about it, was presented. This thesis-project tested the validity of using *lectio divina* as a catalyst for spiritual growth among thirty-eight believers and found that it was indeed successful in helping them to grow in their relationship with God. The conclusion of this project is that *lectio divina* appears to have catalyzed growth in four areas: listening to God; deepening personal relationship with God; using Scripture as a basis for prayer; and being more disciplined in prayer.

Prayer is centered in relationship. Deep relationship with God and prayer have key elements in common. They are both a two-way communion between God and his beloved children. Intimacy of relationship is fostered by time spent together; true communication happens when both listening and speaking occur. When a Christian experiences intimacy of relationship with God in prayer, then prayer becomes a delight rather than a duty. *Lectio divina* can, by its very nature, be a powerful tool and discipline to catalyze spiritual growth in the lives of believers. As it encourages thoughtful reflection on his Word, listening to God speak, responding to his voice and delighting in his presence, *lectio divina* promotes the highest goal of every Christian: to enjoy God and glorify him forever.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER

July 11, 2011

Dear _____,

God is good!! In May I finished my third residency at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and have received approval to begin my research project. This will be the final step in earning my Doctor of Ministry degree. I am writing to ask you to consider participating in this short research project that involves using Scripture as a basis for prayer. All materials would be supplied and your commitment would be to use them during your private devotions three times a week for six weeks. I am conducting this study among mature believers and would greatly value your input.

Prayer has always been an important part of my life and over the years I have enjoyed watching fellow believers grow in their relationships with God through intimacy with Him in prayer. It is very exciting for me to be able to conduct a research project that can have an immediate and beneficial impact on the Body of Christ. If you choose to participate, I believe that you will enjoy using the prayer guide. You will also be doing me a great service by helping me complete my doctoral studies. Although I would greatly welcome your participation, I will understand if you choose not to accept this invitation.

I am attaching the *Informed Consent Document* that will give more details and hopefully answer most questions. If you would let me know of your decision whether or not to participate, that would be very helpful. There is no need to sign the consent form at this time; it is simply for your information. If you agree to participate, the time frame for completing the project would be approximately six weeks from the time you receive the materials. I would mail them to you in the next 1-2 weeks. In your response please include your home mailing address.

Thank you for considering participating with me in this research project. Please feel free to call or email me with any questions or concerns.

In Christ,

Kathy Johnson

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Project Title: **Scripture-based Reflective Prayer¹ as a Catalyst for Spiritual Growth**
Principal Investigator: **Katherine M. Johnson, Doctor of Ministry Program, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary**

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to determine if Scripture-based reflective prayer can be used as an effective tool for spiritual growth among Christian believers. The information gained will be used to help develop prayer guides and training for use in various church and ministry contexts. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you are a Christian who is interested in growing in their relationship with God.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for six weeks beginning from the time you receive the materials.

The following procedures are involved in this study:

1. Each participant will be sent a packet of materials to use over the course of six weeks.
2. Each participant will fill out the initial survey form.
3. Each participant will be asked to use the prayer guide pages in their personal devotions three times a week and record their experience once a week on the response page provided.
4. Each participant will complete a final survey and return the surveys and response pages to the researcher. A stamped return envelope will be provided.
5. The completed prayer guide pages with personal notes will not be returned to the researcher.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

¹ The Catholic version uses "*Lectio Divina*" instead of "Scripture-based Reflective Prayer."

BENEFITS

The potential personal benefits that may occur as a result of your participation in this study are learning to practice a new spiritual discipline, experiencing growth in your prayer life, and encountering God through Scripture-based reflective prayer. The information you provide will also be helpful for future development and use of materials that may help others grow in their personal prayer lives.

COMPENSATION

Each participant who completes surveys, the six response pages and returns all the materials to the researcher will receive a copy of the prayer guide *Jesus Christ—The Word Made Flesh*, written by the researcher.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Survey forms and response pages will not be associated with any name. All the materials returned to the researcher will be kept in a locked file cabinet to which no one other than the researcher has access. The forms will be destroyed as soon as the information has been summarized. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty. Any incomplete data will not be used in the study results.

QUESTIONS

Questions are always welcome and encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Kathy Johnson at xxx-xxx-xxxx, or email: xxxxxx@xxx.xxx.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You may keep the duplicate copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed):

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS AND INTRODUCTION (PROTESTANT)

Scripture-based Reflective Prayer Research Project

Thank you so much for being willing to participate in this research project! I pray that you will be blessed as you spend time in the Word and in prayer.

How to complete your part in this study

1. Read and sign the *Informed Consent Document*. (In Front Pocket)
 2. Fill out the *Pre-Study Survey* before beginning the Prayer Guide. (In Front Pocket)
 3. Use the *Prayer Guide Pages* three times a week for six weeks. At the end of each week fill out the *Weekly Response Sheet* found after each "Day 3."
 4. Fill out the *Post-Study Survey*. (In Front Pocket)
 5. Mail the *Informed Consent Document*, the *Survey forms* and the *Response Sheets* back to me in the stamped envelope provided.
-

Getting Started

For the next six weeks we will be using a simple method of reflection and prayer based on the Scriptures. Our goal is to meet God and allow him to transform our lives more and more into the image of Christ. Since the early centuries of the church, Christians have encountered God through praying with the Scriptures. Sacred reading, as it is sometimes called, involves reading, pondering, praying, listening and, ultimately encountering the Living Word of God so that we may grow in an intimate relationship with him.

In this notebook you will find a prayer guide with a page for each day. Each page contains a passage of Scripture to use for your prayer time. For the purposes of this project please use the four stages for prayer as outlined below. At the end of each week please fill out the *Weekly Response Sheet* provided.

Four Stages of Scripture-based Reflective Prayer

1. Reading—*“Speak for your servant is listening.” -1 Samuel 3:10*

We begin by inviting the Holy Spirit to say to us whatever he wants us to hear. Reading the Scripture passage humbly and prayerfully is the foundation for everything else that follows. This is not reading for information as if you were preparing to teach a Bible study; it is listening to the Word of God. This step involves our intellect and at the same time is a prayerful and reverent act. We are deliberately and consciously making space for God and turning to him with our minds and hearts. We slowly read a short passage several times (aloud, if possible), allowing time to savor the words and let them penetrate our minds. Underline or write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out to you.

2. Reflecting—*“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” -Luke 2:19*

It follows naturally that we move from reading to reflection (thinking about a subject) as we begin to savor the truths that God is revealing. This reflection can take the form of whatever is helpful to the individual. Some may view the passage through the eyes of the author or someone mentioned in the verses. Others may use a journal to reflect on what they have read. We may ask a question such as, “What does this mean?” The Word also acts as a mirror for us when God reveals how much he loves us or shows us something in our lives he wants to change. We approach the Scripture with faith, expecting God to speak. Write down what he shows you.

3. Responding—*“I call on you, O God, for you will answer me.” -Psalm 17:6*

Prayer with Scripture draws us into a deeper encounter with the Living God through his Word. In this stage, we turn the Scripture passage into a dialogue with God, taking time to speak intimately with him. To softly speak the words of sacred Scripture back to God creates conversation with our Creator. We also may ask a question of the Lord such as, “What are you saying to me?” Take time to wait for him to respond and speak to your heart. Listening is a key part of prayer. Many times we think that prayer is supposed to be us talking and asking for things while God listens. In sacred reading, we learn to listen and to be comfortable with silence. God will speak to our hearts as we quiet ourselves before him. Many times he is just waiting for us to open ourselves to hear him and to give him time to commune with us.

4. Resting—*“Be still and know that I am God.” -Psalm 46:10*

This stage gives us the opportunity for an intimate time of communion with the Lord. We simply rest in the presence of the One who loves us and invites us into his transforming embrace. There are times in all loving relationships when words are not necessary. In this stage we let go of our own words and, in silence, simply enjoy being in the presence of God. This is where true transformation of our hearts and lives occurs. Just take time to be with him and let him love you and refresh your soul.

Although we have divided the stages of sacred reading and discussed each one separately, it is also important to point out that they overlap and are movements along a continuum of relationship and prayer. At different times we may experience some or all of the stages, and not necessarily in the order described.

Fruit of a Transformed life

Every genuine prayer experience should bring our life into greater conformity to the Gospel. One's prayer life can be directly measured by how well one is living the truth and message of Christ. The process of sacred reading is not concluded until it arrives at action. **This is why, following the four stages, the last question for each passage is, "How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?"**

APPENDIX D

INSTRUCTIONS AND INTRODUCTION (CATHOLIC)

Lectio Divina Research Project

Thank you so much for being willing to participate in this research project! I pray that you will be blessed as you spend time with our Lord in his Word and in prayer.

How to complete your part in this study

1. Read and sign the *Informed Consent Document*. (In Front Pocket)
 2. Fill out the *Pre-Study Survey* before beginning the Prayer Guide. (In Front Pocket)
 3. Use the *Prayer Guide Pages* three times a week for six weeks. At the end of each week fill out the weekly *Response Sheet* found after each "Day 3."
 4. Fill out the *Post-Study Survey*. (In Front Pocket)
 5. Mail the *Informed Consent Document*, the *Survey forms* and the *Response Sheets* back to me in the stamped envelope provided.
-

Getting Started

For the next six weeks we will be using a simple method of reflection and prayer based on the Scriptures, called *lectio divina*. Our goal is to meet God and allow him to transform our lives more and more into the image of Christ. Since the early centuries of the church, Christians have encountered God through praying with the Scriptures. *Lectio divina* or sacred reading, as it is sometimes called, involves reading, pondering, praying, listening and, ultimately encountering the Living Word of God so that we may grow in an intimate relationship with him.

"It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient tradition of lectio divina, which draws from the biblical text the living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives." (Pope John Paul, II Novo Millennio Ineunte, 39.)

In his document on the Word of God, "Verbum Domini," Pope Benedict XVI calls all Christians to grow in their understanding of the Scriptures. He says,

I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of "lectio divina": the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart. If it is

effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church—I am convinced of it—a new spiritual springtime.

In this notebook you will find a Prayer Guide with a page for each day. Each page contains a passage of Scripture to use for your prayer time. For the purposes of this project please use the four stages of *lectio divina* as outlined below. At the end of each week please fill out the response sheet provided.

Four Stages of Lectio Divina

1. Reading—*“Speak for your servant is listening.”* -1 Samuel 3:10

We begin by inviting the Holy Spirit to say to us whatever he wants us to hear. Reading the Scripture passage humbly and prayerfully is the foundation for everything else that follows. This is not reading for information; it is listening to the Word of God. This step involves our intellect and at the same time is a prayerful and reverent act. We are deliberately and consciously making space for God and turning to him with our minds and hearts. We slowly read a short passage several times (aloud, if possible), allowing time to savor the words and let them penetrate our minds. Underline or write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out to you.

2. Meditation—*“Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* -Luke 2:19

It follows naturally that we move from reading to reflection (thinking about a subject) as we begin to savor the truths that God is revealing. This reflection can take the form of whatever is helpful to the individual. Some may view the passage through the eyes of the author or someone mentioned in the verses. Others may use a journal to reflect on what they have read. We may ask a question such as, “What does this mean?” The Word also acts as a mirror for us when God reveals how much he loves us or shows us something in our lives he wants to change. We approach the Scripture with faith, expecting God to speak. Write down what he shows you.

3. Prayer—*“I call on you, O God, for you will answer me.”* -Psalm 17:6

Prayer with Scripture draws us into a deeper encounter with the Living God through his Word. In this stage, we turn the Scripture passage into a dialogue with God, taking time to speak intimately with him. To softly speak the words of sacred Scripture back to God creates conversation with our Creator. We also may ask a question of the Lord such as, “What are you saying to me?” Take time to wait for him to respond and speak to your heart. Listening is a key part of prayer. Many times we think that prayer is supposed to be us talking and asking for things while God listens. In *lectio divina*, we learn to listen and to be comfortable with silence. God will speak to our hearts as we quiet ourselves before him. Many times he is just waiting for us to open ourselves to hear him and to give him time to commune with us.

4. Contemplation—*“Be still and know that I am God.”* -Psalm 46:10

This stage gives us the opportunity for an intimate time of communion with the Lord. We simply rest in the presence of the One who loves us and invites us into his transforming embrace. There are times in all loving relationships when words are not necessary. In this stage we let go of our own words and, in silence, simply enjoy being in the presence of God. This is where true transformation of our hearts and lives occurs. Just take time to be with him and let him love you and refresh your soul.

Although we have divided the stages of sacred reading and discussed each one separately, it is also important to point out that they overlap and are movements along a continuum of relationship and prayer. At different times we may experience some or all of the stages, and not necessarily in the order described.

Fruit of a Transformed life

Every genuine prayer experience should bring our life into greater conformity to the Gospel. One's prayer life can be directly measured by how well one is living the truth and message of Christ. The process of sacred reading is not concluded until it arrives at action. **This is why, following the four stages, the last question for each passage is, "How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?"**

APPENDIX E
PRAYER GUIDE¹

Scripture-based Reflective Prayer

A Six-Week Journey

by

Katherine M. Johnson

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road
and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Luke 24:32

¹ This Appendix contains the Protestant version of the prayer guide written by the author and used for this thesis-project. The Catholic prayer guide has the following minor differences: Scripture-based Reflective Prayer is called *Lectio Divina*; it uses the NRSV Catholic Edition of the Bible; the four stages of *lectio divina* are called Read, Pray, Meditate and Contemplate.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23 (NIV)

1. **Read** — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times (out loud if possible), savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:

2. **Reflect** — Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, “What does this mean?” to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you:

3. **Respond** — Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.

4. **Rest** — At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?



As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life. Psalm 42:1-8 (NIV)

**1. Read**

**2. Reflect**

**3. Respond**

**4. Rest**

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:27-31 (NIV)

1. Read**2. Reflect****3. Respond****4. Rest**

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. Psalm 103:8-14 (NIV)

1. **Read** — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times (out loud if possible), savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:
2. **Reflect** — Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, “What does this mean?” to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you:
3. **Respond** — Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.
4. **Rest** — At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.

**How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?**

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:6-11 (NIV)

**1. Read**

**2. Reflect**

**3. Respond**

**4. Rest**

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life Titus 3:3-8 (NIV)

1. Read

2. Reflect

3. Respond

4. Rest

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

The Lord is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.

Psalm 27:1-5 (NIV)

1. **Read** — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times (out loud if possible), savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:
  
2. **Reflect** — Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, “What does this mean?” to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you:
  
3. **Respond** — Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.
  
4. **Rest** — At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young — a place near your altar, O Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalm 84:1-4, 10-11 (NIV)

1. Read

2. Reflect

3. Respond

4. Rest

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.  
Psalm 63:1-8 (NIV)

**1. Read**

**2. Reflect**

**3. Respond**

**4. Rest**

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

1. **Read** — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times (out loud if possible), savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:
2. **Reflect** — Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, “What does this mean?” to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you:
3. **Respond** — Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.
4. **Rest** — At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.

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**How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?**

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV)

**1. Read****2. Reflect****3. Respond****4. Rest**

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39 (NIV)

1. Read**2. Reflect****3. Respond****4. Rest**

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Ephesians 1:15-19 (NIV)

1. **Read** — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times (out loud if possible), savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. **Reflect** — Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, “What does this mean?” to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. **Respond** — Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. **Rest** — At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.

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How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

For this reason I (Paul) kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19 (NIV)

1. Read

2. Reflect

3. Respond

4. Rest

~~~~~

How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:9-14 (NIV)

1. Read

2. Reflect

3. Respond

4. Rest

~~~~~

How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11 (NIV)

1. **Read** — Read the verses slowly and prayerfully several times (out loud if possible), savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out:

2. **Reflect** — Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, “What does this mean?” to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you:

3. **Respond** — Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.

4. **Rest** — At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.
~~~~~

How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Psalm 62:1-2, 5-8 (NIV)

**1. Read**

**2. Reflect**

**3. Respond**

**4. Rest**

~~~~~

How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you — the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.
Psalm 121:1-8 (NIV)

1. Read**2. Reflect****3. Respond****4. Rest**

~~~~~

How is God calling you to act in response to what he has shown you?

## QUICK REFERENCE CARD

### Scripture-based Reflective Prayer

**1. Reading**—*"Speak for your servant is listening."* 1 Samuel 3:10

Read the Scripture passage slowly and prayerfully several times, savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out.

**2. Reflecting**—*"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long."* Ps 119:97

Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, "What does this mean?" to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you.

**3. Responding in Prayer**—*"I call on you, O God, for you will answer me."* Ps 17:6

Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.

**4. Resting**—*"Be still and know that I am God."* Ps 46:10

At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.

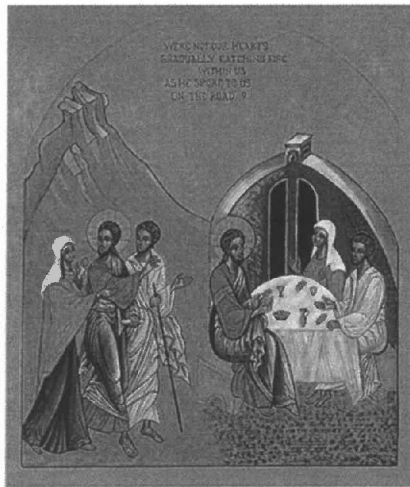
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CATHOLIC PRAYER GUIDE COVER

# Lectio Divina

Encountering God through the Ancient Practice of Sacred Reading

A Six-Week Journey in Prayer



"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road  
and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Luke 24:32

## CATHOLIC QUICK REFERENCE CARD

Front

### *Lectio Divina*

Encountering God through the Ancient Tradition of Sacred Reading

**1. Read** – Read the

Scripture passage slowly and prayerfully several times, savoring the words and letting them sink in. Write down any words or phrases that seem to stand out.



**2. Meditate** – Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Come in faith with the expectation that the Lord will speak to you. Ask him a question such as, "What does this mean?" to help you reflect more deeply. Write down any insights that God gives you

**3. Pray** – Prayer is a two-way conversation with the Lord. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you in his Word, especially taking time to listen to what he may be saying to you personally. Write down your prayer to the Lord or record whatever he says to you.

**4. Contemplate** – At any time, when you begin to sense the presence of the Lord, stop any mental effort you are making and just rest in and enjoy his presence.

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## What is *Lectio Divina*?

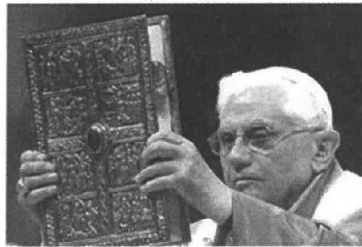
*Lectio divina*, literally, "sacred reading," is a traditional way of praying with the Scriptures which involves reading, pondering, praying, listening and, ultimately encountering the Living Word of God so that we may grow in an intimate relationship with him.

*"It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient tradition of lectio divina, which draws from the biblical text the living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives."*

(Pope John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39.)

*"I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of "lectio divina": the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (Dei Verbum, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual spring-time."*

(Pope Benedict XVI *Verbum Domini*)



## APPENDIX F

### PRE-PROJECT SURVEY (PROTESTANT)

#### Pre-project Survey

To be completed at the beginning of the six week study

This questionnaire is designed to explore how you view prayer and your interest in growing in prayer. The information you provide will be helpful for future development and use of materials that may help others grow in their personal prayer lives. This study is being conducted by Kathy Johnson, student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The number at the top of the page will only be used to link the pre- and post-project survey forms. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name.

#### Personal Information

1.) ☐ Male ☐ Female

2.) What is your age:

☐ Under 18 yrs ☐ 18-25 yrs ☐ 26-40 yrs ☐ 41-60 yrs ☐ over 60

3.) How long have you been a Christian?

☐ Less than 2 yrs ☐ 2-9 yrs ☐ 10-20 yrs ☐ More than 20 yrs

4.) What would you consider to be your primary church background/denomination?

#### Spiritual life and Prayer

Please answer all questions based on your current experience rather than on what has been true in the past.

1. How would you describe your current spiritual life? (For example: growing/stalled/non-existent/etc.)
2. Do you believe that your spiritual life has grown significantly in the past 3 years? ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
If yes, in what area(s) has the change occurred?

3. Overall, how would you describe your satisfaction with your own spiritual life today?
4. How would you describe your desire to grow spiritually right now?
5. How would you define prayer to a new Christian?
6. Briefly describe your own prayer life. (For example you may include: How do you spend your prayer time? Do you mostly talk or listen? Is prayer more of a duty or a delight? )
7. What aspects of your prayer life would you like to change or grow in?
8. Do you regularly reflect or meditate on Scripture? (as opposed to study) \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No  
If Yes, please describe.
9. Do you regularly use Scripture when you pray? \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No  
If Yes, how?

## APPENDIX G

### PRE-PROJECT SURVEY (CATHOLIC)

#### Pre-project Survey

To be completed at the beginning of the six week study

This questionnaire is designed to explore how you view prayer and your interest in growing in prayer. The information you provide will be helpful for future development and use of materials that may help others grow in their personal prayer lives. This study is being conducted by Kathy Johnson, student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The number at the top of the page will only be used to link the pre- and post-project survey forms. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name.

#### Personal Information

1.) ☐ Male ☐ Female

2.) What is your age:

☐ Under 18 yrs ☐ 18-25 yrs ☐ 26-40 yrs ☐ 41-60 yrs ☐ over 60

3.) How long have you been actively pursuing your relationship with God?

☐ Less than 2 yrs ☐ 2-9 yrs ☐ 10-20 yrs ☐ More than 20 yrs

4.) Have you always been Catholic? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, please describe your church background.

#### Spiritual life and Prayer

Please answer all questions based on your current experience rather than on what has been true in the past.

1. How would you describe your current spiritual life? (For example: growing/stalled/non-existent/etc.)

2. Do you believe that your spiritual life has grown significantly in the past 3 years? ☐  
Yes ☐ No

If yes, in what area(s) has the change occurred?



3. Overall, how would you describe your satisfaction with your own spiritual life today?
4. How would you describe your desire to grow spiritually right now?
5. How would you define prayer to another Christian?
6. Briefly describe your own prayer life. (For example you may include: How do you spend your prayer time? Do you mostly talk or listen? Is prayer more of a duty or a delight? )
7. What aspects of your prayer life would you like to change or grow in?
8. Do you regularly reflect or meditate on Scripture? (as opposed to study) \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No  
If Yes, please describe?
9. Do you regularly use Scripture when you pray? \_\_\_\_Yes \_\_\_\_No  
If Yes, how?

## APPENDIX H

### SAMPLE WEEKLY RESPONSE SHEET

#### Weekly Response Sheet—1

Please write about your experience in prayer this week. You may use any of the following questions to guide you. Your responses on this page will be very helpful, not only for the purposes of this study, but also in the future development of materials that will be widely used in various church settings.

- How would you describe your overall experience of prayer this week?
- How did you experience God speaking to you?
- How did you notice God's presence with you?
- Why did you enjoy or not enjoy your prayer time this week?
- What was the best thing about using Reflective Scripture-based Prayer<sup>1</sup> as a guide for your time with God?
- Did you have any difficulties?

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<sup>1</sup> The Catholic version uses "*Lectio Divina*" instead of "Scripture-based Reflective Prayer."

## APPENDIX I

### POST-PROJECT SURVEY

#### Post-project Survey

To be completed at the end of the six week study

This questionnaire is designed to explore how your experience and view of prayer may have changed as a result of this study. The information you provide will be helpful for future development and use of materials that may help others grow in their personal prayer lives. This study is being conducted by Kathy Johnson, student in the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Please be assured that all of your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be presented only in summary form, in combination with the responses of other participants in this study. The number at the top of the page will only be used to link the pre-/ and post-project survey forms. The answers that you give will never be linked with your name.

#### Participant Information

Did you complete all 6 weeks of the study? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No If not, how many? \_\_\_\_

Did you complete the pre-project survey? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

Did you complete a Response Sheet for each week of the study? \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

#### Spiritual life and Prayer

Please answer all questions based on your current experience rather than on what has been true in the past.

1. How has your definition of prayer changed (if at all) as a result of participating in this study?
2. How has your desire to pray changed (if at all) as a result of participating in this study?
3. Overall, how would you describe your satisfaction with your own spiritual life today?

4. Do you think that the use of Scripture-based reflective prayer<sup>1</sup> has helped you to grow spiritually over the course of the last 6 weeks?  
Why or why not?

5. How would you evaluate the contents and effectiveness of the Prayer Guide?

6. Do you intend to pursue this kind of prayer in the future? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No  
Why or why not?

7. How could the materials used in this study be improved?

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<sup>1</sup> The Catholic version uses "*Lectio Divina*" instead of "Scripture-based Reflective Prayer."

## APPENDIX J

### PREQ6 RESPONSES

Category 1: Stated that their prayer life involves listening to God.<sup>1</sup>

- “Prayer is a delight! I mostly talk but am finding the past few years myself doing more listening. I pray all throughout the day.”
- “Prayer is a time I can speak to God and listen and I try to set time daily to talk to God. Adoration I try to do once a week to just sit and pray with God. It is a delight and relief from everyday life just to be with God.”
- “I’m a talker, so I’m praying throughout the day but when I finally just quiet myself to listen, he is faithful to speak.”
- “It has changed during the past few years. It formerly consisted of mostly of asking for things, now it is mostly asking about things. I ask less for the Lord to change circumstances and ask more about what circumstances mean.”
- “Sometimes I can’t wait to start talking to God and my whole time is spent talking and listening. Sometimes I will read, ask for God’s explanation and then journal. I will probably never hear physically God’s voice, but I know he is there. I do hear his silent voice. I have learned to listen to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and to love and talk to God.”
- “Daily Mass, Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet. Daily holy hour in adoration. Constant dialog with the Lord throughout the day. I mostly ask questions and pray for others. I listen throughout the day when I’m alone. Prayer is a delight,”
- “Both talk and listen. It is a responsibility when it is prayer regarding others. It is a requirement for connecting to/engaging with God and what he is doing.”

Category 2: No mention of listening to God as part of their prayer life.

- “I don’t have dedicated prayer time. I pray short prayers throughout the day as I am thankful or need help.”
- “I pray in bed, before getting up—it’s just talking to God about the upcoming day. I pray before all meals, very grateful for my many blessings. I pray with friends, often for specific needs. I mostly talk.”

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<sup>1</sup> All responses in this appendix are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

- “Brief praises, largely intercession for others. Mostly talking, it’s not exactly a delight but a bit more than a duty.”
- “I go through phases; currently more talk than listen; more spontaneous not very structured.”
- “It’s a delight. I have prayer letters from 60 or so friends plus Operation World; lots of praise not just requests; detailed prayer lists.”
- “Each morning I pray the Liturgy of the Hours, psalms, songs, petitions, prayers from scripture and from the Church, lift up my own requests. I pray the Rosary now and then. I go to daily Mass now and then. I pray through the daily Mass readings. Pray throughout the day and try to be aware of his presence.
- “It has become a job. I want the joy back. I have a hard time sitting and being with God. If I am up and busy I have no problem talking to him.”
- “Not what I’d like, sporadic, more petition based than anything else.”
- “I usually talk—ask for things, pray for others. I don’t find it delightful—prayer is hard for me.”
- “I don’t have a set devotional time. I often do Bible or Christianity related reading at breakfast time. My praying happens at the odd moments throughout the day as something comes to mind....My prayers are mostly talking.”
- “Talk. Read the Word and use the passage to worship, thank and simply love him praying back the words of Scripture to him. I do a lot of talking.”
- Brief phrases, largely intercession for others. Mostly talking—it’s not exactly a delight but a bit more than a duty.
- “I mostly talk. The listening happens throughout the day. I would like to have more time for reflection and listening in the morning. I pray for a country every day which helps me keep a global perspective.”
- “Talk. Read the Word and use the passage to worship, thank and simply love him praying back the words of Scripture to him. I do a lot of talking.”

## APPENDIX K

### POSTQ1 RESPONSES

- “I don’t think my definition has changed but my practice and experience has.”<sup>1</sup>
- “My prayer focus shifted more toward resting in the Lord, praying/reflecting more throughout the day and night.”
- “I feel like I knew about prayer but this emphasis on humbly reading scripture and making room for God, not just reading but really waiting for God to speak through scripture and to me, being still and listening. That has taken some patience for me, something that is not usually my nature.”
- “I don’t think my definition changed but I think it gave me another means to deepen my experience of communication with God.”
- “I have learned to be still and listen for God. Not to be in a hurry to speak or to end the prayer session.”
- “No, but the study helped me focus more. Previously my prayers were ‘to’ God and not so much ‘with’ God. This study helped me prepare more for dialogue with God.”
- “It hasn’t really changed, but was enhanced by addition of Scripture. My only exposure to Scripture was Mass, even daily Mass, but I never meditated on it. This was surprisingly a very effective way of communicating more deeply with God and getting a response and direction.”
- “My definition hasn’t changed but was I more convinced of the power and glory of meditative scripture prayer.”
- “Seeing prayer more as communing with God than simply ‘talking’ to God. Allowing time for dialogue not just monologue. Focus of prayer has changed as I relate it to Scripture.”
- “Well, I’m giving the Holy Spirit time to speak to me rather than having just a one-way communication.”
- “This type of prayer is not new to me but rather I am reminded of it. The idea of thinking deeply on one or two verses and letting God’s Word become my prayer has been rekindled in me.”

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<sup>1</sup> All responses in this appendix are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

- “No, but perhaps a bit more of conversation through Scripture.”
- “No, my praying has become more focused on God’s character. I have been praying more of his words about himself. I have been reflecting more and spending more time in silence before God. I now respond more to God after reflecting and the thought comes automatically of what to do about it.”
- “No, but prayer now to me is a powerful tool and this has brought me closer to Christ.”



## APPENDIX L

### POSTQ4 RESPONSES

Reason 1: Because of using Scripture as a basis for reflection and prayer. (50%)<sup>1</sup>

- “Yes, having Scripture as an anchor for reflection is very helpful in keeping my wandering mind more focused.”
- “I believe using this tool is an amazing way to use Scripture in everyday life and to truly just absorb the knowledge and love Christ has for you. I feel a deeper connection to Christ through prayer.”
- “Yes, it has helped me to be more intentional in thinking through a passage and then to use it as a means of communication with God.”
- “This study has helped me get started in the morning. This reflective prayer has been both helpful in revealing God’s Word more clearly and it has helped in growing my spirit and my soul. I will continue to use this guide as a guide to continue from this point on. It has helped me tremendously.”
- “Definitely! I would love to teach it to others. It has helped me tremendously to have this plan for daily scripture reading and prayer. Praying the Scripture daily helps me put God’s ways firmer in my heart and helps me live them.”
- “Yes, it’s increased my confidence in the fact that God tells me things in his Word—for me, particularly.”
- “I seem to do a lot, daily Mass, Adoration, Rosary, and Divine Mercy Chaplet, but sometimes I need something more. While all these are good prayers, the best prayers, *lectio divina* because it combines Scripture and contemplation, brings a new depth and richness to my relationship with God. It has added to the quality of my prayer life.”
- “It has definitely helped. Writing down phrases has been especially helpful. I’m a visual learner and writing helps to imprint the ideas on my brain, and then I have those words in front of me as I reflect on them.”
- “Yes, because through His Word I’ve gotten closer to Him. Multiple times a week I’ve encountered him tangibly.”

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<sup>1</sup> All responses in this appendix are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

- “Yes, it seems it can’t help not to—but specifically it’s the power of the words of Scripture that have gotten into my mind and heart through this that have caused me to contemplate and grow.”

Reason 2: Because of listening to God or being quiet before God and hearing God speak. (50%)

- “Yes; I needed to practice what I believed; I needed to not just seek understanding at a deeper level but listen for God to speak; Listening is a habit I need to develop more and more.”
- “Yes, it has helped my growth. First, it has given me structure and discipline. Second, it has taught me how to pray in quiet and listen to the Lord. Prior to this study, I spent very little time in prayer.”
- “Yes definitely. The discipline of this study, knowing that I needed to do three of them each week was a great part of it. As I got further into it I really began to look forward to what God had to say to me each day”.
- “Yes, it has helped me to practice some spiritual disciplines that I have not practiced much in the past. I have spent more time in silence before God, more time meditating/reflecting on God’s character. More time resting in him and journaling, writing my prayers to God. I have an increased desire to seek him and find time to spend with him.”
- “Yes, it has helped me to be more intentional in thinking through a passage and then to use it as a means of communication with God.”
- “Yes! He is patiently waiting for me to talk with him, not at him.”
- “Yes, it’s increased my confidence in the fact that God tells me things in his Word—for me, particularly.”

Reason 3: Because of experiencing a deeper connection with God in prayer and/or deeper relationship with God and awareness of his presence. (38%)

- “Yes, this kind of praying enhances my relationship with God because I’m allowing Him to speak into my life more.”
- “I believe using this tool is an amazing way to use Scripture in everyday life and to truly just absorb the knowledge and love Christ has for you. I feel a deeper connection to Christ through prayer.”
- “Yes because I felt my spirit being in communication with God as well as mentally.”

- “Yes, it has helped me to practice some spiritual disciplines that I have not practiced much in the past. I have spent more time in silence before God, more time meditating/reflecting on God’s character. More time resting in him and journaling, writing my prayers to God. I have an increased desire to seek him and find time to spend with him.”
- “Yes! This has reaffirmed to me what I have known but neglected to grasp—the great desire of God to be with us.”
- “Yes I do. It has expanded my view of prayer greatly. My tendency was to think of real prayer as dry and boring and full of endless petitions—the stereotypical prayer meeting. Now I see prayer as refreshing and more alive, a connection with God.”
- “Yes, it’s helped me focus more on God’s character—to want him. It’s too easy to slip into wanting his provisions rather than his presence.”
- “Yes, I do. Because I am more aware of God during the day and I look forward to going to Mass and spending time with my Catholic friends.”
- “I seem to do a lot, daily Mass, adoration, rosary, and divine mercy chaplet, but sometimes I need something more. While all these are good prayers, the best prayers, lectio divina because it combines Scripture and contemplation, bring a new depth and richness to my relationship with God. It has added to the quality of my prayer life.”
- “Yes, I’ve started to get up and spend time solely with him—no distractions of phone, computer. Thank you, 1000x Kathy!”
- “Yes, because through His Word I’ve gotten closer to Him. Multiple times a week I’ve encountered him tangibly.”

Reason 4: Because of staying focused and/or being more disciplined in prayer. (44%)

- “Yes, having Scripture as an anchor for reflection is very helpful in keeping my wandering mind more focused.”
- “Yes, it has helped my growth. First, it has given me structure and discipline. Second, it has taught me how to pray in quiet and listen to the Lord. Prior to this study, I spend very little time in prayer.”
- “Yes definitely. The discipline of this study, knowing that I needed to do three of them each week was a great part of it. As I got further into it I really began to look forward to what God had to say to me each day.”
- “I feel it has helped me grow. It has helped bring the focus I was lacking. I had got caught up in reading the Bible just like story. This helped me.”

- “This study has helped me get started in the morning. This reflective prayer has been both helpful in revealing God’s Word more clearly and it has helped in growing my spirit and my soul. I will continue to use this guide as a guide to continue from this point on. It has helped me tremendously.”
- “It has definitely helped. Writing down phrases has been especially helpful. I’m a visual learner and writing helps to imprint the ideas on my brain, and then I have those words in front of me as I reflect on them.”

## APPENDIX M

### POSTQ5 RESPONSES

#### Negative Feedback<sup>1</sup>

- “I appreciated the simplicity of the prayer guide! Wished I’d recalled or remembered your words on the fruit of the transformed life because I didn’t get the connection...i.e. how is God calling you to act in response. That was the hardest part for me to answer and follow through.”
- “I believe its intensions are good but I am not sure that I can find Biblical support for ‘hearing God speak today’ other than by dwelling on his revealed Word, the Bible.”<sup>2</sup>
- “Overall, it was very good and well laid out. I thought some of the Scripture choices were pretty basic and repetitious, but I expect you planned it that way.”
- “I thought the first three sections<sup>3</sup> were very helpful in analyzing the passage and applying to my life and praying back to God. I wasn’t quite sure what to do with the last one.<sup>4</sup> It seemed to me to be a bit anticlimactic. I think it is a good means not to rush off to what is next on my agenda but its practicality escapes me. Maybe it is intended to give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to apply what has been learned to my life. And that is good!”
- “The verses and subject matter was well chosen and I appreciate how you put it together, categorically. My one concern is that when Scripture are not looked at contextually we can draw conclusions that may be more interpolations. However, the Holy Spirit still spoke and I thank you for the challenge.”
- “I believe the guide is very effective, but I had a hard time with the content. There were times that I wanted to deviate from the content to meditate on other mysteries.”
- “I think the passages are well chosen but I would prefer the RSV Catholic Ed. instead of the NRSV.”

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<sup>1</sup> All responses in this appendix are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> This comment indicates that there was a misunderstanding about what it means for God to speak and that *lectio divina* is, in fact, “dwelling on God’s revealed Word.”

<sup>3</sup> The participant is referring to the first three steps of *lectio divina*—read, meditate (or reflect), and pray (or respond).

<sup>4</sup> The participant is referring to the fourth step of *lectio divina*—contemplate (or rest).

## Positive Feedback

- “The Scriptures chosen brought comfort and encouragement.”
- “Thank you for asking me to part of your research. It’s made a huge impact on my prayer life!”
- “Very effective, simple, easy to understand and do—continuity helped develop different prayer patterns The Scripture based Reflect prayer card I used every day, very good reminder, will keep it up.”
- “Very well thought through. Good variety in Scripture chosen. I intend to try it on various—most books. You did an A+ job getting your 5 categories. I’d guess that took a lot of thought.”
- “Very good. I appreciated how the Scripture passages reinforced each other thru the week.”
- “I really loved the flow of the Scripture from the very familiar (and how I took the content of them for granted) to the confirmation of his love, to the longing (waiting and longing for his presence and his words to me) to instruction and discipline and then to what he has done and is doing in my life and finally to the confirmation and reminder that he is my refuge and rock.”
- “It helped me to get back to the allowing God to be God and to stop trying to control my world.”
- “Very good, thought provoking, balanced, always what I needed for that day, that time.”
- “The prayer guide is excellent. It started out with favorite OT and NT passages but helped me identify with our Lord in these passages in a new and deeper way. The passages in the guide helped me realize in a new way how great God’s love is for me and led me to a deeper desire to seek him with my whole heart.”
- “Good choices of topics and Scriptures. The explanation of the four R’s was helpful, especially Reflect.”
- “The content is God’s Word. What more can I say? The Guide was very effective in giving me a starting point for my conversation with God and my praise for his work in my life.”
- “Excellent - I would like to share it with those I love.”
- “Great selection of Scripture passages. Very diverse but representative of reflective-type verses. Enjoyed them.”

- “I am always amazed how God can bring together a variety of inputs in a centralized message. The selected Scripture passages have increased my intimacy with God as the Holy Spirit has spoken to me the Word, complementing other readings.”
- “I was pleased with the format. The process of reading the passage several times and picking out key word and phrases helped me really contemplate the message. The process of focusing on God’s Word and asking God to provide insight and direction caused me to have a more enlightened prayer experience.”
- “Good Scripture, meaningful Scripture. Good repetition of steps in the sequence; Good amount of time to start a new habit; Good explanation of what to do.”
- “Thematic grouping of Scripture for several days was good because of the reinforcement factor. The steps of read, reflect, respond were good though often the reflect seemed to come as part and parcel of the reading. Respond part is good because it makes one pause and directly address God. The rest part I didn’t do much. Maybe I can grow into it. The action response part was good but probably only 50% of the time I had something concrete to put here.”
- “I love that small card with the steps of *lectio divina*. Sometimes I feel stuck and can refer back to that sheet.”
- “I like the grouping of passages on a topic/theme , the #3 ‘respond’ step and its definition was of particular help in making my reflection with God more focused and personal.”
- “I think the contents were just right in quality and size. It was small enough so that it was not intimidating but sure packs a punch in quality. Doing these in succession also made it effective because I learned more and more how to do it each time.”
- “I appreciated the simplicity of the prayer guide!”
- “Very good easy to understand, focused. I now keep the prayer card in my Bible journal as a reminder when I pray.”
- “The Scriptures were very well picked. Each one spoke to me and that could only happen if they were prayerfully picked.”
- “I think the passages are well chosen.”
- “I love the small card. I’m re-reading scripture during Mass.”
- “It was very good. I especially liked weeks 1 and 2.”
- “Very good.”

- “I think it is very useful and helps reflect on your own thoughts.”
- “Very good, But now I want to see how this works when I start reading lists of the temple supplies and genealogies!”
- “Good overall.”
- “The prayer guide is easy to use with any Scripture so I can continue to use it daily.”
- “Fair—it is no magic bullet—it is a help and it showed me a different way to interact with Scripture than my normal.”



## APPENDIX N

### POSTQ7 RESPONSES

- “Tell the reader to feel free to use both sides of the page.”<sup>1</sup>
- “Maybe to explain further the intent and use of step 4. Some of us over-practical sorts may find it difficult to use as is. Thanks for the great study and opportunity to learn another way to approach the scriptures and prayer.”
- “I think I’d like to see it done with consecutive passages. (I like going through a Gospel start to finish).”
- “For this initial study, the contents were fine. The method worked well for me and it very much achieved its purpose. I can see going through a whole book of the Bible in this fashion. This structure works very well and I will use this method to help in my spiritual growth.”
- “I suspected early on that this was based on *lectio divina*. For me, because I’m a reader, I would have liked more written material.”
- “If it were to be made into a small booklet, it might be good to pair each verse with a beautiful piece of artwork.”
- “People are so different. For me steps 1 and 2 happened at the same time, naturally. So I think of those more as one step. However, I’m sure others would find they benefit from the breakdown into step 1 and 2.”
- “It was very good the way it was. Perhaps give 2 or 3 other translations.”
- “A daily study could be useful. Reference to Bible Translation used could be helpful in case one wanted to compare with other texts.”
- “I would like it better if the guides were focused on something bigger than individual verses. For example, having guides that take you through a whole book or chapter or particular point of faith.”
- “Ask for more, hope to see it in print soon.”
- “None. I think you should print this out as a study guide for *lectio divina* and sell it as a booklet. The passages were well ordered and seemed to lead the reader through

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<sup>1</sup> All responses in this appendix are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

various themes to the ultimate goal - trust in God, surrender to him. This was very well done! Don't limit this to beginners. It is for everyone."

- "I kept going back to the page 2 where 4 verses were given alongside the definitions of the 4 stages. The Scripture passages were the biggest help in defining, guiding the process. In fact I would rewrite them out many days. Perhaps a reminder to listen for one word. I tended to make it complicated. I was so determined to hear that I forgot or overlooked the last bit—how is God calling you to act?"
- "Maybe add questions for reflection for each scripture passage? For those who may need help starting the conversation with God."
- "Maybe different Scriptures than best known passages."
- "Have the explanation of the steps on each day."

## APPENDIX O

### WEEKLY RESPONSE SHEETS

#### Comments from Week One<sup>1</sup>

- “At first it was difficult to determine which words, phrases stood out. But as the week went on that became easier...God brought these words to mind throughout the days when I would begin to struggle. His presence was evident in the redirection of my thinking. I enjoyed it and looked forward to my next ‘meeting’ Using the guide gave me focus that led to intimate time with my Lord. The best part being that it spilled into the rest of the day and caused me to desire this for each day beyond the ‘required’ 3.”
- “I felt the time spent in this type prayer very personalized this week, God met me right where I was. God spoke through different words and phrases and through quiet time and resting.”
- “I separate Bible study and prayer - the first is analytical, cerebral. Prayer is the old 5 steps. I use prayer letters and Operation World. I haven’t been this introspective in ages. I need this.”
- “My experience overall this week of prayer was very much needed and I feel it is helping me have a deeper connection with the Lord. I had forgotten what an amazing experience it is to have Him speak to you if you would just allow yourself to listen to him. I went to a quiet room each day and would pray for his presence before I began the readings and I could feel his presence before me, helping me really absorb the meaning of the scriptures. Lectio divina is a great tool for me because it helps me to focus more on what the Scripture is saying to me and how I can use it in everyday life.”
- “I feel the Lord’s pleasure and presence when I quiet myself and stop doing all the talking. I enjoyed just chewing each word in the Scriptures given. There were invitations, commandments, promises, encouragement, and intimacy. It was refreshing, challenging, encouraging, and sobering. Best: always seeing who God is his great love for me, prodding me to be more like him. He loves our time together.”
- “Interruptions but wonderful communion with God. I gained new insights about God, His character and His activity in caring for me. Multiple readings of each passage, meditating on particular words was very rich and satisfying. Reflecting and applying concepts to my experience in life and all the way God has brought me was wonderful. It increased my love and gratitude to God. Resting after reading, reflecting and

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<sup>1</sup> All responses in this appendix are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

responding caused all of the previous time to sort of roll over me in waves. Great! Like floating over a beautiful coral bed while in calm crystal clear water, watching the beauty of God's works. God's presence came into my awareness by the new insights gained while reflecting."

- "The Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is encouraging me to STOP and spend time LISTENING to what God wants me to get out of my reading. Journaling helps me remember what He said."
- "Overall, my experience was good. Probably the greatest revelation for me was on Day 1. Realizing anew that simply pondering/meditating on the Word is prayer. It has been way too easy for me to think of formal spoken prayer as the only "real" prayer. I often spend time thinking and listening for God's response but tend not to call that prayer—but it really is."
- "My overall experiences were beautiful and restorative. I like to dwell in quietness with God - to think about what he is saying and how it applies to my life. I notice he quiets my concerns when I reflect on who he is. There is freedom in the knowledge of my brokenness and weakness because it allows me to hope in him."
- "The Scripture gave focus. My mind didn't wander like it often does in prayer."
- "I think the Scriptures were awesome. They were just great to linger over and re-read again and again."
- "My overall experience was that I experienced deeper levels of intimacy with God than I have recently experienced. I experienced God speaking to me as I noticed certain words that caught my attention and then wrote them down and then reflected on them in the light of my current circumstances."
- "Experience was satisfying. It was easy to get into a rhythm or pattern. I felt that my intentional act of being still was unique to my prayer life. Having to sit and listen was an important part of the prayer segment."
- "Starting with reading Scripture and meditating helps clear my mind of other thoughts and really center on God, His Word and my response. I love His presence! So when I get quiet enough and center my thoughts on Him, He is really present and I don't want to leave."
- "I feel like this is encouraging me to go back to the way I used to read/reflect/drink in God's words. I hadn't read Psalm 23 for a while and when I read it on the first day it hit my emotions and soul deeply."
- "I have been doing this sort of prayer but not so intentional and structured. I felt like it helped me to get better understanding of the Scripture I read and its application. It was a good guide to prayer to help me to be led by God in what to pray instead of

falling into a prayer rut. I also felt like it opened my heart to hear more from God and focus more on him. I felt like this was really hearing from God and responding to him rather than just listing to him my requests, which is such an easy rut to fall into in prayer.”

- “My overall experience of prayer this week is more watchful, more patient, coming to him with an open heart but without expectation. I noticed more peace, less worry. I especially liked the action point at the end. It made sense to me that when God speaks to us and vice versa, it should cause a change in us to act on his Word.”
- “Sweet times with God as I buried myself in these Scripture passages. I lingered over them, so all sense of rush and panic were set aside. In the peace and excitement of reading the passages I heard God speak to my harried and frantic lifestyle.”
- “I spent more time than usual in prayer this week. I like having a Scripture to focus on—it helps me stay on track during my devotional time. I find my mind is less likely to wander. God has never stopped speaking to me, but when I am in the Word I seem to hear Him more.”
- “Slowing down and concentrating on the words was lots different than zipping through a passage. I noted more things. Had a sense almost of hidden treasures revealed that I, as a casual reader, would have missed. Felt a bit more connected with God. Even in my other Scripture reading it is slowing me down, that is, I’m not just rushing through it.”
- “What I’ve loved about *lectio divina* is that I can LISTEN to God and not just talk to him and ask for things. There is something very comforting about reading Scripture in this way and fun. There is something deep in me that is touched and also challenged by Scripture. It is an experience like being fed and nourished.”

#### Comments from Week Two

- “Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is helping me to really look at Scripture- see what it says about God, about me and then immediately dealing with God—thanksgiving, clarification, repentance, seeking his strength, wisdom and direction.”
- “I noticed his presence with me giving me strength to get up and face the day relying on him.”
- “Very different prayer this week. Felt God more in control. Felt God’s guiding presence.”
- “Able to concentrate better. Listening more. He puts thoughts in my head as I read and ponder Scripture. I have a quietness, a peace, a new thought.”

- “It was a powerful experience of God’s extravagant love. I haven’t ever read Scripture over again—several times before. Amazing what you miss the first time around, then the second and third.”
- “The best thing about using lectio has been spending time really listening to God after I ask him to help me understand the passage. As I ponder God’s Word it seems to become part of my being, sinking deep into my heart and soul and mind.”
- “This week I seemed to be more in tune with God. It was much needed prayer time. I really enjoy the time to reflect and just have God hear my thoughts and prayers. I truly enjoy the one on one time to reflect on the Scriptures and apply them towards my daily life.”
- “God was very verbal this week but mostly when I chose to quiet myself and be alone with Him. Best thing: about Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is just the new taste of Scripture I’ve read before.
- “I noticed God’s presence with me during reflection and rest. In fact one day, I fell asleep after about 15 minutes of rest and woke up later meditating on Psalm 103. It is a very valuable and precious thing to me; God is showing me that for each of these experiences with Him, there is a way that I am changing which will cause me to take action in my relations with others.”
- “I found as I meditated on these passages that it made me even more desirous of deepening my relationship with Him and to follow Him no matter what the cost. As I meditated on these passages prayer was a natural response.”
- “I am beginning to look forward to this time with God. I like using the reflective scripture-based approach to prayer because it keeps me focused and it seems more productive than just one-way prayer.”
- “It seems each day I am getting better at concentrating on my Savior. I like this style of devotional prayer. Thanks!
- “It is becoming easier to put myself aside and wait for God. This form of prayer makes it easier to feel close to God. It helps to keep me focused. The Scripture leads me to pray on a deeper level than the usual petition and thanksgiving.”
- “It was easier this week, not only to go through the Scripture exercises, but to realize that even small or seemingly insignificant things I was hearing were indeed from God.”
- “Greater introspection, awareness of his mercy and grace; in quietness and rest his presence seemed more real, this made my prayer time more meaningful and enjoyable; the best thing was a deeper resolve to rest in him, experiencing anew his extravagant love, forgiveness, peace and joy.”

- “Overall good or at least improving; I am much more aware of prayer as internal dialogue with God.”
- “I love using this Reflective Scripture-based Prayer because it allows God’s Word to sink into my heart and mind. It allows God to explain and apply to my current situation.”
- “I once again found myself drawn into deeper communion and deeper experience of God’s presence and God’s love through these times of prayer and meditation. I believe that prayer is becoming more of a default behavior for me as I encounter the circumstances of each day. I enjoyed my prayer time because it gave me time apart to set aside circumstances and concerns and enjoy my relationship with God. The best thing about Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is that it is well planned and laid out and draws me in quickly to commune with God.”
- “I continue to enjoy having the selected verses as a basis for reflection and listening for what God is saying. A bit different than a read-it-through chronological reading guide where one focuses on getting the day’s verses read!
- “It seems the more I practice this, the more my prayer time centers on listening. I still have my regular prayer requests for family members and friends, but more and more those prayers for them change some to pray for them about the truths I am learning each day from God’s Word.”
- “I believe using lectio helped me become more aware of God’s presence throughout the whole day.”
- “Left two of the guides unfinished but noticed God speaking to me later with recalled passages. Because I’d read and reread the prescribed passages, they surfaced with answers to questions later—incredible, powerfully, sweet.”
- “I’ve been waking up at 5am and I realized God is waking me up to pray. Using Scripture as a basis for prayer keeps me from making prayer time a to-do list for God. I can focus on him rather than what he can do for me.”
- “Wanted more time; just wanted to sit still and quiet; God spoke through the text and the silence; it’s a struggle to find the time. Lectio divina is nice because it gives you the content for the (prayer) time.”
- “Prayer still a bit rushed but improving. I now don’t skip prayer in favor of just reading.”
- “I have enjoyed starting my day with these passages. I’ve found that some ideas/thoughts have stuck with me.”

### Comments from Week Three

- “The best thing is that I meditated on Scripture. I really looked at Scripture, talked to God about what he was showing me. Sought his direction on what I was to do with his Word. By focused prayer, thoughts, ideas replay all day as God continues to speak to me.”
- “I noticed his presence by sensing his embrace and acceptance as I internalized the truth of what phrases he pointed out. The best thing was his bringing those truths to mind as I interacted during the day. I enjoyed my prayer time because God met me at my need.”
- “Reading his words can renew me more than I realized! Felt God with me as before yet reminding me. He is close at hand always if I just slow down and look.”
- “This is good. I like it. Quietness was enjoyable and putting responsibilities and worries aside. A peaceful time in a busy week. It is a good guide to keep me from analyzing as in a word study or the crazy evangelical tendency to outline everything.”
- “It’s amazing what parts of script come to life when you read it over and over again, not just 3 times but 5 and 6 times straight in a row, there is a pattern of words that begin to pop out. Putting them together causes the Word of God to come even more alive.”
- “The meaning of His Word seemed to “jump off the page” as I read and reflected on His Word.”
- “Prayer this week was more pressing in, listening in on the strategies and plans of heaven. The more I pray the more I want to pray. The more time I spend with the Lord, the more I need him and want him. I love digging with a small shovel in these reflective scriptures to examine each word and promise rather than plowing through the Word.”
- “I’ve had a deepening of my awareness of my need to respond to my desire to seek the Lord at all times. I need to grow in my awareness of dwelling/abiding/living in His presence. I’ve become aware of how little I pay attention to the desires of my heart to be in His presence. How little I gaze/reflect on the beauty of the Lord. I’ve become more aware of the need to reflect on God and His truths. I desire silence to be alone with God. God’s awesomeness is getting much larger in my awareness.”
- “I found that noting certain words or phrases at first were disjointed and not connected in a pattern. Once I meditated on them and let God speak to me they would fall into a pattern and sequence that spoke to me. All in all I felt this week that using this method was coming together in my mind and is a helpful way to allow God to use the scriptures in my life.”



- “I like having a format for dwelling of God’s words—not just moving on to the next passage. I find myself looking forward to stopping other activities and sitting in a quiet place and reflecting on various scriptures. I like the discipline I am developing.”
- “This week I really felt God’s presence. It was an overwhelming feeling of being loved and of joy. I wanted to study more and never lose that feeling but of course the enemy intervened and it took several days before I forced myself to open this book again. Once I did open it the feeling returned—as if God had been waiting for me.”
- “It was such a relief to be able to pray in such a way that it is all about God. And no matter what issues I’m facing, the answer to it all is God! The best thing about it this week is how it colored so much else in my life. It wasn’t so much about interesting insights into the verses, but how it changed other things in my life.”
- “My conversations with God yielded feelings of peace. The more I longed for his presence, the more I felt his love.”
- “I am continuing to experience God’s love and his presence more deeply than I have for over a year. Reflective Scripture-based Prayer consistently draws me to a greater depth of relationship, to a more intimate relationship with God.”
- “His presence is often so real I don’t want to leave. This has changed my whole being! I just rested, really rested in Him.”
- “I think that in general I’m experiencing a more relaxed sort of centered inside feeling as I go through the day because of these past several weeks of taking these reflective prayer times.”
- “My spirit has been more sensitive to God because of the practice of Reflective Scripture-based Prayer.”
- “I discovered that Scripture has been a firm foundation of the Church from the beginning. It is not just a resource, but THE source of our Catholic faith.”
- “I lived in the passages all day. The Lord gave me prayers using the very words that jumped out. The hard circumstances were somehow filled with a peace and a power due to the constant all day meditating on the Scriptures even when I had no time to open my Bible. The Lord carried me through with joy and peace.”
- “I think that this week I began to realize how much I miss closeness with God. I do long for him and I feel him drawing me closer. Scripture came to mind all during the week. I am also more aware of God’s presence.”
- “Very good experience of prayer; I’m beginning to really thirst for this time with the Lord.”

## Comments from Week Four

- “Prayer this week kept me focused on what does not change in the midst of my changing circumstances. I enjoyed the new understanding that resulted from my prayer time.”
- “I slowed down a bit more and enjoyed it even more than ever. This is good!”
- “Amazing how the passages were very familiar yet God spoke to me clearly each day: revealing new truths I had not thought about or considered. I was dumbfounded and amazed by how God revealed himself—how I prayed on a new level.”
- “Provides some structure and focus—I don’t ramble as much and silence is OK.”
- “I am very grateful for these powerful times of prayer. I feel it is a very important tool as I come into the fullness of the Catholic church and as he equips me for the work he has for me to do.”
- “I have felt the more I make time for prayer and just really read the Scriptures, I have more patience and understanding and I feel closer to Christ.”
- “This week was wonderful. I seemed to not struggle or look at this as homework I had to do.”
- “Reading each passage this week I received new insights and ways of understanding God and myself that had not occurred to me before. I find myself praying the text, applying the text to my past experiences and thanking God for what He has done. I have enjoyed Reflective Scripture-based Prayer greatly because it helps me focus on God and who He is as well as what He has already done for me.”
- “I think the best thing about Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is the discipline of taking time to think through a passage of Scripture and allowing the Holy Spirit to apply it to my life.”
- “I need this desperately because I am always in such a rush! I am still impatient—always in a hurry to move on to something else. However, when I do relax and reflect on these readings, I love it—it’s like an oasis in troubled waters. God’s Word calms me down and reminds me of how I should be living. I still resist Him in certain areas.”
- “I experience God speaking to me through the words of Scripture. God uses Scripture to open my mind to all kinds of thoughts regarding the words I read. My sense is that as I’m asking God to guide me, he does bring certain things to mind and cause me to consider them.”

- “This week, I found phrases of his words sticking in my head. The best thing about Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is that I focus on what God has said—I focus on truth and allow him to use it to speak to me and change me.”
- “I continue to find these times of prayer drawing me into a more intimate relationship with God and find I am increasingly aware of his presence through the day. My prayer time was like daily bread, sustaining in midst of chaos.”
- “Discernment was easier this week. God’s words and my ability to pray flowed easily. I really felt in tune with God as the Scriptures really seemed to be a real catalyst to my prayer.”
- “I love, and really look forward to spending time in meditative prayer daily! This is a great way to do it.”
- “I find I continue to revel in the meditative/reflective part and what God brings to mind and the encouragement or challenge I receive.”
- “The best thing about reflecting on Scripture while praying is the guidance it provides my thoughts to align with God’s thoughts and plan.”
- “My prayer life really seemed to grow this week. I had an increased desire to pray the rosary and the Liturgy of the Hours.”
- “I felt the Lord’s presence in new ways by just the power of one phrase or one word. The words gave me life—fresh guidance from the Lord. The whole exercise was almost all done in rest. Sweet! Because I’d stopped panicking and rushing and let the Lord lead.”
- “The more I read the Word and pray, the more I want to. When I first began this prayer guide, I was reading and learning but I wasn’t hearing God. I heard him this week. Using Scripture as a basis for prayer captures my heart and mind.”

#### Comments from Week Five

- “My experience of prayer was more one of awe and pleasure as I realized that the Lord was showing me things I would never think to search for. Using the guide provides much needed focus.”
- “I found myself thinking more and over and over, about the words and their meanings this week. God brought to light phrasing and their meanings this week. I felt God was sitting with me.
- “Challenging! Paul prayed for his converts so differently than I pray for friends, missionaries. Change: going slower—this is good! God’s presence: joy. The challenge to pray for the spiritual aspects of those I pray for rather than health,

protection and converts. Best thing: guiding me to use script to pray, not my thoughts.”

- “This has been the most moving and powerful week. My prayer time in *lectio divina* has definitely changed this week. I feel as though I broke through a wall that I did not even know was there. The Scripture this week seemed as if God was speaking directly to my longing to be created anew for this new life he has given us in the RCC. He is telling me exactly what he is doing in me and how he is accomplishing it, this marvelous and powerful work in me! By using *lectio divina* I really stop and listen. I felt that I have been listening before, but not like this! No difficulties, just great joy and overwhelming time with God.”
- “Spiritually I feel a great understanding and joy of being able to feel Christ’s presence in my prayers. He is patient with me and listens and never is negative but shows love and compassion always. Just feeling his presence makes me feel at peace. I know I have said it before but each week makes me feel closer with Christ.”
- “This helps me focus on one small aspect of God I had not seen before. This also helps with 5am prayer time and I am not just reading to meet my Bible quota for the day.”
- “Better than last week! This week, there is more of a deliberateness and fervency of praying his Word, asking the Lord to help me in what he sees that I need. The Lord opens my eyes to Scriptures I’ve read over and over, but there are those times when for that day it is bread and life.”
- “The overall experience of prayer this week was great. Praying with Paul helped me to be thankful for Christ’s work in new ways and helped me to pray Paul’s prayers for others. Sometimes I think I am being too analytical with ‘what does this mean?’ But on the other hand, by asking this question I am getting many new insights into God’s nature and especially the extent of his love. The experience is becoming more natural/routine to pray the scripture as I read it. I start responding as I am reading. Reflection has become more extensive. Responses are more personal. What did I enjoy? All of it! I have never written out reflections during my devotional times with God. Writing out my reflections and prayers (responses) has been immensely beneficial to me personally. In the past I resisted writing or journaling lest I be writing notes for future teaching. I now found that this writing is just between God and me. I have found that I can’t stop with the short selection which is excellent. I have to go back to the text and read more. So, this reading leads me further into scripture.”
- “I did this week’s reflective reading and prayer outside again and found I could think more clearly.”
- “As I learn to listen more for God’s leading and to be open to what he wants me to hear, I find it easier to experience his presence. The best thing about using this type of

prayer is that as I reflect on the Scripture given each day God brings other scripture passages to my mind that relate to the original, thus broadening my understanding.”

- “This study guide has been helpful in that it gives me structure and keeps me focused and keeps my mind from wandering. By the time I am finished I can feel his love more abundantly and I feel refreshed.”
- “Another deepening realization reinforced by this study is prayer is far more than communication—it is communion. My whole being is involved in communion with God - not just my intellect through words. Prayer is an attitude of my heart—an openness to God.”
- “His power was revealed through the Scriptures in such a way that I desired to kneel as I spoke with him. My hope feels rekindled.”
- “The Lord impressed on me the priority of knowing Him. Genuinely pursue knowing and understanding and appreciating the depths of his heart is the goal of prayer. Not reciting a wish list to a celestial Santa.”
- “Discernment of God’s message came easy and I was able to have meaningful prayer with God. The passages really stuck a chord with me this week and felt God’s presence more than at any other time in the study.”
- “Praying the Scripture every day has made prayer more intimate and more focused on my relationship with God.”
- “I noticed God’s presence in the power to grasp his will and love as I reflected on his word. The best thing about this prayer guide is giving myself a chance to stop and respond to the reflections on the passage.”
- “I realized that often when I read Scripture without the reflective method by the time I get to the end of a long sentence I don’t really know what it all was trying to communicate. Taking notes helps. Asking God for understanding helps.”

#### Comments from Week Six

- “This week I felt I rested more—that this way of praying through Scripture was becoming more than an exercise, that God was using it to slow me down so I would listen to him. The best thing about using Scripture-based Reflective Prayer is that it is helping me to slow down to rest to wait upon the Lord during my time with him.”
- “When using the guide I experience a back and forth conversation more than when I don’t use it. This two-way conversation brings about an intimate connection to what the days held and my response and approach to it. I enjoyed how the Lord showed me things I would not have begun to search for. I had difficulty in that I knew this was

the last week and I didn't want it to end. Having said this, I know it won't end—that I'll use this method as I continue in prayer."

- "Wow! What fantastic sections these are! Best thing: helps me see the richness of his Word—FULL of nuggets to ponder all day."
- "My experience this week has been of a beautiful picture of our wonderful God. This week was the summation of it all. This is who he is, what he gives us and that we need only to be still, know and wait for all that he has for those who love him. It just does not get any better! This week the Scripture lined up with all that is going on in our lives. The lectio divina has been an incredible bonding tool for (husband) and me as we discussed all that God is doing. This week and all of this experience of using lectio divina has been such a beautiful experience. We were able to share this experience with our RCIA group this week in a discussion group, telling about how God speaks to us in the Scripture. I am so grateful for this tool and for this week's assurance of who he is for us. Best part...his reminder of who he is if we listen and be still before him."
- "Enjoy! What was there not to enjoy!!! How precious it is to reconnect many, many ways that God has watched over and protected us. Where are the next passages for weeks 6-52? I know I will need to provide them for myself, and I hope to do it with many other passages of Scripture."
- "It was another good experience of prayer this week. It didn't change that much over previous weeks but it did deepen and became a bit more natural to experience. Once again I wrote out my prayers which I have never done before. I won't do this all the time but it is a good experience focusing the mind and making His presence more real. I found it an easy experience to practice although it does take a commitment of time and discipline. Thanks for sharing your vision and method of prayer. It does have great benefit it followed regularly."
- "This week was by far the most enjoyable—partly because reflective prayer is becoming habitual and partly because these passages of Scripture are among my favorite."
- "This week it flowed—it came easier. I followed the outline but didn't sweat it if I saw something different or if only one word jumped out or if a dozen phrases jumped out. One of the things I really enjoyed was hearing God afresh in familiar passages. Very encouraging to hear the living Word."
- "This week has been great. My experience has changed. I realized that through the help of God's Word that this form of prayer is a great way for me to get started each day during my morning time with God. Before this study, I would sometimes have a hard time getting started. God speaks to me all the time. His presence is more prevalent when I am quiet and in him.. I did enjoy my time with God this week. His presence has been realized in other parts of my life. Other times during the day I am

noticing him more. The best thing about this study has been structure. The guide has been just what I need. I will continue to use this type of prayer in the future. No difficulties. Thank you for allowing me to participate in this research.”

- “Best thing: When I take the time to focus on a Scripture before prayer it really does change my prayers. They are much more focused on God than they are on people and petitions. I would say my prayers move toward communion with God as opposed to simply talking to God.”
- “I noticed the Spirit reminding me and prompting me during my counseling sessions and prep times for work next week. I enjoyed my time with the Lord. It was a nice peaceful moment in the middle of the frenzy of life.”
- “Prayer has been a more consistent part of my daily experience. I find myself turning to prayer throughout the day, often returning to the thoughts and Scriptures of the focused morning prayer time. I find God speaking to me as I reflect respond and rest. I enjoyed my prayer time because it continues to nurture my intimacy with God.”
- “I enjoyed the study. The aspect of being still and listening for God was very useful and unique to my other studies. The assignment of picking out key words and phrases helped me key in on the message of the Scripture. Over the weeks I found that I took more opportunities to pray and found myself listening more for God’s instruction.”
- “The best thing about using Reflective Scripture-based Prayer is that I am truly drawn into his presence and experience his voice speaking to me. I am so sad this is the last day, but I plan to continue using this method as it is very well established in my thinking—thank you for doing this. I am also going to teach this to others—can’t wait to get the published version.”
- “Felt God impressing on me his care and watching over me and thus a greater sense of being able to be ‘at rest.’ No matter how short or long, I leave with a sense of having spent time with God. The verses jog my thoughts and I consider that to be one of God’s way to talk to me. Having the respond part prompts me to give thanks which often is easy to overlook doing.”
- “I liked, actually throughout the 6 weeks, that the 3 days of passages were all on a chosen theme. It helps to reflect more than once within the week on the chosen theme. It forced me, again to stop and ask for a few moments, ‘Ok, Lord what does this say to me, personally?’ It also helped me limit how many verses to concentrate on in one sitting. I see now that I had been tending to jump around the Bible as one verse reminded me of or got me curious about another verse/passage somewhere else. This helped me stop and focus.”
- “Reflective Scripture-based Prayer has been taking a long time to do. I realized that I was taking my time and communing with God and it was OK to take my time. It is becoming more of a habit to read Scripture this way, where I am letting it soak in.”

- “I experienced an increased desire for prayer. I started to have prayer times that were a bit less formal and more personal. I’ve started reading my Bible a lot more carefully and slowly. I also decided to start a blog so I can keep a record of what I read and my thoughts on these verses.”
- “I finally understand the importance of reading Scripture frequently. I understand now how it starts from being just words, to internalizing it, and then how it changes us to respond in some way. I thought I understood it when it was explained but really you have to do it repeatedly in this order to really experience it. I got it! I’ve done it, I know how to do it, go through it and now I can continue building my faith on Scripture. Wow. this was the one piece that was missing in my prayer life.”
- “Nice thing about this is the repetition and re-examination of Scriptures.”
- “I find that by starting the day with this focus that I can return to these thoughts and ideas throughout the day.”



## APPENDIX P

### WEEKLY RESPONSE SHEETS--DIFFICULTIES

- “Slowing down and resting and listening to God.”<sup>1</sup>
- “Still had difficulty setting mind at rest to help me rest in the Lord. Also difficulty setting time apart to do it.”
- “I am still getting used to this way of prayer—to be still and listen for God. I’m looking forward to developing in this reflective prayer. The hard thing for me to overcome is putting my own agenda in the way.”
- “God has not spoken to me audibly ever. Among those who claim God speaks to them today are the some of the worst charlatans of our era who do a great dishonor to the name of Christ. God rewards those who trust him without sensory confirmation.”
- “Sometimes it’s hard to put aside tasks at hand to wait patiently for him.”
- “Time factor, tend to pray on the move rather than in a devotional setting.”
- “Day 2 not as dramatic an awareness of God, wasn’t good at the ‘rest’ bit but felt a sense of hope that rest was a part of the experience.”
- “It was hard to be still as I haven’t been in quite a long time.”
- “The hardest part is to rest.”
- “The time constraint is a bit irritating. Maybe I’m too busy.”
- “I had to force myself to get up and do it. Once I get started it’s wonderful. The difficulties are just calming me down enough to be with God.”
- “It’s still difficult to find quiet clam, relaxed, non-busy time for this reflection. Too many summer distractions—but I’m not turning on the TV; I’m trying to sit outdoors to do this; and I’m waiting on God more. When I stop thinking, writing, talking, I give God a chance to communicate with me.”
- “Still sometimes is a struggle to still my brain.”
- “The only difficulties I ever have speaking with God are my own sin and problems.”

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<sup>1</sup> All responses in this appendix are taken from survey conducted by author, August-October, 2011.

- “Circumstances cutting short the time.”
- “I find that ‘doing’ the rest part is not something that comes naturally to me and I need to allow more time to actually reach a resting point. I’m finding I really need to be where there are no distractions to have felt I’ve allowed for being reflective and open to God.”
- “My struggle to put a high priority on taking this kind of reflective time continues even though I’m so glad to have taken the time after I’ve done it.”
- “I’m still struggling with the rest part. I need to slow down during that time.
- “Started becoming more routine. Hard to sense God’s presence. Getting impatient with familiar passages.”
- “When I discipline myself to do this, I find it rewarding in the end—but not without struggle. The temptation to skip over prayer and get to the tasks at hand is great and sometimes I give into it.”
- “My difficulties usually are getting quiet to listen—I usually pray before I start and just seek to rest in his presence first to clear my mind.”
- “Busy week—but doesn’t matter the spacing of the days for prayer. Just setting time aside to contemplate and pray somewhere along the way is what matters.”
- “Not allowing the distractions to dominate my consciousness was the greatest difficulty.”

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## VITA

Katherine Mills Johnson was born in Bartlesville, Oklahoma in 1960. She graduated from Washington University in St. Louis in 1982 with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology. She received her Master of Arts in Theological Studies from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 1984. Katherine and her husband Richard, live in Grand Prairie, Texas. They have served as missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators since 1983 and spent eleven years in the Philippines. They have two children, Carol and Ken, and two grandchildren. Katherine began her doctoral studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in January of 2009 and anticipates receiving her Doctor of Ministry Degree in May of 2012.